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"Every so often, a bike blows our minds, and on this occasion it's the Ribble Aero 883. As an exceptionally high-spec package for the price, not to mention out-performing the other three bikes in its willingness to destroy any road, it's not only our test winner but also the winner of the BikesEtc Gold award."

BikesEtc

As reviewed: **£1,999.95**



Sportive Racing

Carbon frame and fork road bike

"Incredible equipment on a very decent chassis makes for a truly stunning value ride."



As reviewed: **£1,999.00**

"The perfect blend of position, comfort and speed, making this frame equally suitable for sportives or amateur road racing."

road.cc
pedal powered

As reviewed: **£899.99**



Ti Sportive Racing

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As reviewed: **£1,299.99**

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R872

Carbon frame and fork road bike

"The lightweight set-up uses T800 Toray carbon fibre for the ultimate in stiffness and weight reduction, while the design and internal cable routing mean it positively slices through the air."

METRO 5/5

As reviewed: **£1,200.00**

"An ultra-stiff bullet of a bike that offers bags of speed to the discerning and ballsy rider"

T3 5/5

As reviewed: **£1,200.00**



Gran Fondo

Carbon frame and fork road bike

"The Gran Fondo delivers a superb value, speedy but surefooted ride that's made it Ribble's biggest-selling carbon road bike."

bikeradar ★★★★★

As reviewed: **£1,300.00**

"A sharp racer or an extravagant commuter that's bound to draw jealous glances at both the office bike racks and sportive start line.."

T3 5/5

As reviewed: **£1,149.95**



Sportiva Carbon

Carbon frame and fork road bike

"Carbon, Shimano 105 and Mavic Aksium wheels with quality tyres, saddle, bars and tape all for under £1.2k is an excellent deal, too – you'd struggle to find better"

total
WOMEN'S CYCLING

As reviewed: **£1,193.30**

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WISH YOU WERE HERE

Wiggle Haywards Heath Howler

It may take place on home soil while some of the 'epics' are staged abroad but, now in its sixth year, the Haywards Heath Howler is becoming known as one of the tougher rides on the sportive calendar. With an epic distance of 103 miles, and more than 2,500 metres of climbing this is a real test, taking in some beautiful climbs around Sussex including the infamous Ditchling Beacon. Starting off from the South of England Showground, you'll not be short of views to distract from the leg-sapping effort before passing through the delightful Ashdown Forest. Get your entry in quick.
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk



THIS MONTH

New tech, fitness food, Haute Route Rockies

STRAVA REPORT

Last month Strava released a new Women's Cycling Report, believed to be the biggest of its kind, based on a survey of over 5,000 active female cyclists in the UK aiming to determine motivations, influences, buying attitudes and views on barriers to entry for more women taking up cycling. For more on this visit strava.com

- 61%** of female cyclists surveyed are inspired by pro cycling
- 84%** of female cyclists are motivated by health & fitness
- 52%** cycle for leisure and recreation, 32% for commuting to work
- 60%** say there aren't barriers to entry for more women taking up cycling
- 63%** ride socially at least once a week
- 60%** ride a women-specific bike

PROUD TO BE BRITISH

To celebrate what is now the full Hackney GT 'designed in London, made in England' cycle fashion range, there will be a launch party complete with DJs at London's Look Mum No Hands on Tuesday July 26.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Rock-hard riding in the Rockies

Last week I was riding the Haute Route Rockies test event in Colorado, USA. Billed as the "highest and hardest sportive in the world" it is a seven-day stage race. Most days were over 100 miles with an elevation gain of between 3,000m and 4,000m. We also spent a lot of time riding at altitude. The full details of the event will be out this month.

It was beautiful but in all honesty I spent most of my time

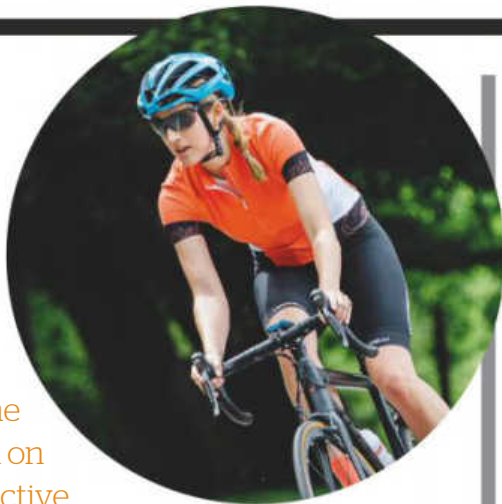
staring at the hub in front and getting buzzed by the broomwagon. At times I wanted to get off my bike, lie down and sleep.

Simon Warren's column really resonated with me this month (p26). He is right, 'epic' is an overused term. 'Hard' is another. The Rockies made me reassess what hard really felt like. I thought I had done some hard rides this year — it turned out I hadn't.

The weird thing is as soon as

you climb off your bike, get changed and have a recovery drink (or beer) it becomes difficult to remember how you felt while you were riding. But I do know that in the Rockies I came as close as I ever have to getting in the broomwagon. Would I do it again? Yes, absolutely!

Hannah



MARS DOES PROTEIN

We now have an excuse to eat Mars Bars and Snickers in the name of cycling recovery, tasting just as sweet and enriched with 19 and 18 grams of protein respectively, these new bars could be a worthy post-ride treat.



NEW FROM RAPHA

This month the cyclists' luxury clothing favourite Rapha has revealed two new sports bra designs as it expands its women's collection. Available now at rapha.cc



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WE LIKE

Software

Mavic Haute Route shoes £135

Celebrating Mavic's provision of neutral support for the Haute Route race, these shoes eschew the brand's hallmark yellow. Mavic says that they're rigid with a full-carbon sole but with a comfortable fit for all-day riding over the Haute Route's unrelenting cols.

www.mavic.co.uk



Tissot T-Race Touch Tour de France watch £360

This special edition watch has been released to celebrate Tissot's new role as official timekeeper of the Tour de France. Packing in an altimeter, barometer and compass as well as lap timing and two alarms, the T-Touch delivers a lot of useful information.

uk.tissotshop.com



Kask Protone Giro d'Italia Special Edition helmet £189.99

The Protone is the helmet used by Team Sky, but this special edition pink version celebrates the Giro passing by Kask's headquarters. Light and with class-leading drag and heat removal, Kask says it's its most advanced helmet design to date.

www.velobrand.co.uk



Altura Podium Elite mitts £27.99

With a synthetic leather palm with gel inserts and ventilation holes, these mitts are comfortable in warmer weather. They are tab-less, with the backs being stretchy enough to get them on and off easily. They are designed to fit with fewer creases for increased riding comfort.

www.zyro.co.uk



Castelli Mondiale bibshorts £190

The new Mondiale is Castelli's top bibshort. It's made with 50 per cent Lycra for a close, comfortable fit with few seams. It comes with the brand's best Progetto X3 Air seatpad but very few logos, aiding a stealthy look.

www.saddleback.co.uk



G4 Brazil national jersey £125

The Olympics are just around the corner, so G4's Brazil flag jersey is topical. It's also bright and lightweight, so it should be comfortable in Rio's heat. It comes with quality touches such as single layer grippers and zip garages top and bottom.

www.g4dimension.com



Ekoi Rainstop arm-warmers £19.50

French direct sales brand Ekoi makes these arm-warmers from fleecy Super Roubaix fabric, so they're warm. They are also treated for water resistance — useful for the UK summer. The fluoro yellow colour means that you should be very visible too.

www.ekoi.com



Lusso Race Base Mesh base layer £22.99

For hot-weather riding, a mesh base layer helps keep you cool. Lusso's is made in the UK with Italian fabric. It is very lightweight, quick drying and stretchy for a close, comfortable fit. It comes in five sizes from S through to XXL.

www.lusso.bike

Oakley Radar EV Path Rio Edition glasses £155

The Rio edition of Oakley's popular Radar Path sunnies comes with a frame that is the same green colour as the Brazilian flag, Oakley's interchangeable red lenses and in a special Olympic design soft case for carrying.

www.oakley.com



Hardware



Mio Cyclo 505HC computer £399.99

With a colour touchscreen, navigation and a 'Surprise Me' route generator, this top-of-the-range cycle computer comes with heart-rate monitor and cadence sensor. It now has Strava Live segment functionality too, for real-time segment information.

www.raleigh.co.uk



Clément LCV clincher tyre £49.99

The LCV is named for the symbol for the airport in Lucca, Italy — a regular cycle race destination. At just over 200g for the 25mm width, it's light and is designed for a subtle, comfortable ride and good grip in both dry and wet weather.

www.clementcycling.com



Lezyne Digital Pressure Overdrive pump £129.99

To get tubeless tyres to seat can require a high volume of air to be delivered quickly. The Overdrive pump has a reservoir that you charge, then release to inflate the tyre. The digital gauge ensures that you've got your pressure just right.

www.upgradebikes.co.uk



Fizik Aliante R1 saddle £189.99

Designed for less flexible riders, the Aliante R1 saddle comes with carbon rails and base to give a claimed weight of 185g. It's Fizik's widest saddle, with the most pronounced curvature for comfortable all-day riding. The Aliante is available in black or white to match your bike.

www.extrauk.co.uk



Fabric CO2 Lever Kit £19.99

Fabric's inflator kit neatly combines everything you need to get a replacement tube up and running. There's a rubber sleeve around the cylinder to protect your hands from the freezing effect of CO2 and the pack's rubber straps attach it securely to your bike's frame for easy carrying.

www.fabric.cc



Knog Blinder Mob V Kid Grid rear light £34.99

Visible at over 1,000 metres on its highest setting, Knog's rear light includes three different strap lengths to fit different-sized conventional and aero seatposts. It's rechargeable via an integrated USB plug, operates in five modes and has 16 LEDs.

www.todayscyclist.co.uk

DT Swiss RRC65 Dicut wheelset £1999.98

Used in tubular form by DT Swiss's sponsored pro teams, the 65mm-deep RRC65 aero wheelset is now available as a clincher. It has a 25mm external rim width to support wider tyres, ceramic bearings and a claimed overall weight of 1,585g.

www.madison.co.uk

**Guee Sio bar tape £28.68**

This silicone bar tape is soft, durable and can be rewrapped multiple times as it does not have backing adhesive. It's washable and waterproof, non-slip and is available in eight colours. Each pack comes with bar-ends and finishing tape.

www.guee-intl.com

**Camelbak Podium bottle £10.99**

The 'Jet Valve' on the Podium bottle opens automatically when the bottle is squeezed, and it allows high flow rates for rapid rehydration. A handy sealing lever stops it leaking all over your kit on the way to events.

www.zyro.co.uk

FOOD SWAP

POTATO

Calories: 80 | Fat: 0g | Carbs: 18g | Protein: 2g

SWAP FOR SWEET POTATO 100G

Calories: 86 | Fat: 0g | Carbs: 20g | Protein: 2g

WHY?

Sweet potatoes are brightly coloured and, as with most coloured fruit and veg, are a rich source of antioxidants. They contain more fibre than white potatoes and also have a lower GI, which helps to prevent sudden glucose spikes. In addition, they contain 400 per cent of the daily recommended amount of vitamins A and C, the former essential for healthy eyes, the latter for an efficient immune system. Serving for serving, the calories are similar but the nutrient profile of sweet potato is superior.

HOW?

This is the simplest food swap imaginable. Prepare sweet potato in exactly the same way as an ordinary white potato. You can bake them, make chips or crisps and mash them. The only cooking method that doesn't suit them is boiling.



LAST MINUTE

Free weekend
on the horizon?
Here are two
great events
you can enter:

Wiggle Yorkshire Tour Sportive

Saturday August 20
North Yorkshire
Distance: 103/81/39 miles
Elevation: 1559
HQ: Thirsk Racecourse YO7 1QL
Entry £35/26
Featuring parts of the Tour de France Grand Départ route, you'll experience some of Yorkshire's finest scenery along quiet roads and high, exposed moorland. Be prepared for challenging climbs.
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

Evans Ride It Somerset Sportive

Sunday August 7
Distance: 89 miles
Elevation: 1563 metres
HQ: Priddy, BA5 3BA
Entry: £25.00
Somerset is far from flat as you will find out on this undulating route. With multiple crossings of the Mendip Hills this finishes with climbing the iconic Cheddar Gorge. Take time out for cheese and cider at the end of the event.
www.evanscycles.com

Booking now

SIGN UP FOR THESE EVENTS

Sunday August 14



FRANCE
LE CLASSIQUE FRANCAIS

Entries are open

DISTANCE 59/83 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 513M (LONG)

CA says: New for this year this fast-paced route begins as soon as your roll your two wheels off the ferry and onto the Calais tarmac. A cobbled switchback climb to the town of Cassel will be the day's test on the rapid countryside roads.

[@ukcyclingevents](https://twitter.com/ukcyclingevents)

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

Sunday August 14



AYRSHIRE
THE FLYING SCOTSMAN

Entries are open

DISTANCE 77 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 1,502M (LONG)

CA says: Take on the roads that Graeme Obree trains on. This route features lots of punchy climbs on quiet roads that travel through East Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire and is titled 'the Beastie!' Catch a wheel if you can to take the sting out of the work — you never know, it might just be Obree's...
www.obree.com

Sunday September 18



SPAIN
LA Cerdanya

Entries are open

DISTANCE 128/200KM

TOTAL ELEVATION 4,026M (LONG)

CA says: If you want to get stuck into some serious climbs then get your bike bag packed and head to the Pyrenees. Pulling north over three significant passes you'll cross the border into France before looping back. This area averages 3,000 hours of sunshine per year so it'll make for a welcome break from our washout of a summer.
lacerdanyacycletour.com

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Olympic champion **Joanna Rowsell-Shand** gives us some advice when it comes to following a training plan

1 The act of writing down a training plan is really important. Whether it's on paper or on a computer you're much more likely to follow it, rather than having it in your head that 'I'll probably do this, or I'll probably do that the day after.' Write down your actual planner and the times you're going to do it, if you're planning it around work. Don't just think you're somehow going to fit in two sessions in a day if you can't do that realistically, so plan it in advance.

2 This may sound a little contradictory but don't get upset if you have to change your training plan — even the best plans in the world have to be changed, whether that's due to illness or injury or a day where you just haven't got the energy, it's OK to have a duvet day sometimes, not every day but

being adaptable is really important. Have a rest and come back stronger rather than slogging away slowly and not really putting the quality work in.

3 When you're lacking in motivation, think about why you wrote your training plan in the first place. If I'm having a really bad day and I really can't face training, watching back a race that inspires me, whether that's the World Championships or Paris-Roubaix, I always find watching something like that really inspires me to get back on my bike. And get training hard again.

4 Finding a training partner, or someone to compete with, I think is really good, if you're going out on the road on a day that it's raining or something and you don't quite feel like it.

Having someone to meet can help you get out of the door on time which helps a lot on cold or rainy days — you don't want to let someone else down.

5 Assess how it's going. Test yourself so you can see your improvements. That's also easily done with a Wattbike — perhaps every three weeks when you've gone through a phase of training, have some recovery and then test yourself. It's always motivational to see that the training is working but also to check that it is working, that you are doing the right things, that your zones are improving and that your power is going up.

Joanna Rowsell-Shand is an ambassador for Wattbike and was speaking to Rebecca Charlton at Ethos, Spitalfields.



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schwalbe.co.uk

SCHWALBE DURANO



Storck Aernario Platinum £10,999

Storck's Aernario Platinum takes ultra-lightweight carbon bike bling to the next level

Nothing builds up your expectations of a bike like a big price tag, and the Storck Aernario Platinum has one of the biggest out there. Eleven grand is an insane amount of money to be spending on a bike, but if you've got deep enough pockets then you won't regret your investment.

The Aernario comes with a handful of aero features, such as the kamm-tail down tube and the hidden seatpost clamp, but the German company's real focus has been on making this bike as light and stiff as possible.

The frame weighs just 790g, and fully built up with Shimano Dura-Ace Di2 and Lightweight Meilenstein tubular wheels the bike barely bothers the scales at a svelte 5.8kg. In fact it's so light that the standard reaction upon picking it up is to simply laugh. No surprise then that the Aernario is an absolute bullet up the hills, and it's not uncommon to find oneself cruising up 15 per cent gradients only to look down and find there are still three or four sprockets in reserve.

It's no mere featherweight novelty, however — the Aernario is great to ride too. When sprinting and descending, the performance is simply astonishing, with amazing handling, lightning fast acceleration, and a willingness to hold its speed that few bikes can match.

If you can afford to spend 11 grand on a bike, then this is the bike to spend it on.

www.storck-bicycle.cc

Drivetrain

Front derailleur

Shimano Dura-Ace Di2

Rear derailleur

Shimano

Dura-Ace Di2

Cassette

Shimano

Dura-Ace Di2, 11-25t

Brakes

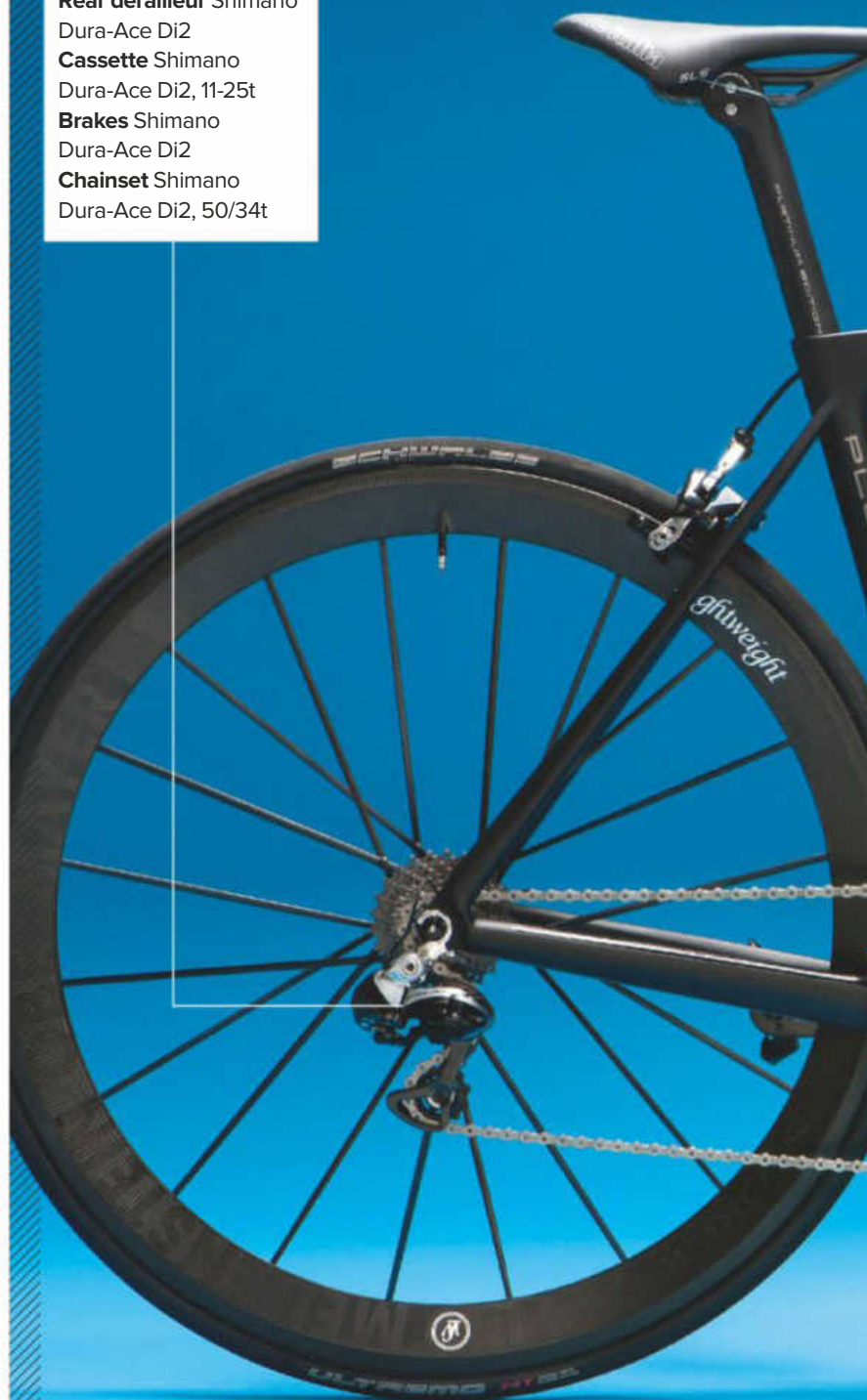
Shimano

Dura-Ace Di2

Chainset

Shimano

Dura-Ace Di2, 50/34t



Frameset

Frame Storck Aernario
Platinum, UB carbon-fibre

Fork Storck Stiletto 280

Seatpost Storck Monolink
MLP 135

Finishing Kit

Handlebars Storck RBC
120 Carbon

Stem Storck 115 Alloy

Saddle Selle Italia SLS
Monolink saddle

Wheels

Wheels Lightweight
Meilenstein Obermayer
Storck Edition

Tyres Schwalbe
Ultremo HT, 22mm



“The German company’s real focus has been on making this bike as light and stiff as possible ”

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SATURDAY 24th JULY

Epic **102 miles** | Std. **76 miles**
Short **46 miles**

If ever there was a perfect setting for a sunny sportive to unfold on a weekend's morning, the Meon Valley would be up there with the best. Its spectacular views across to the Solent, Spinnaker Tower and Isle of Wight make this one not to miss.



SUNDAY 31st JULY

Epic **98 miles** | Std. **74 miles**
Short **51 miles**

It turns out the only way isn't Essex – this sportive spills out into Suffolk for a scenic tour on rolling roads in the best unexplored parts of both counties combined.



SUNDAY 31st JULY

Epic **100 miles** | Std. **87 miles**
Short **52 miles**

The Wiggle Hell of Hexham sportive might make your legs think you're sinking halfway into the underworld by the time you're finished, but you're in for some spectacular views on sprawling cycling roads that see over the Tyne Valley, through the North Pennines and beyond.



SATURDAY 6th Aug

Epic **102 miles** | Std. **76 miles**
Short **46 miles**

We'll set you off just outside of Bournemouth on this ride, which explores the brilliant countryside and surrounding scenery in the counties of Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire. Balancing quiet rural roads, outstanding natural beauty and packing in three testing climbs this all-round sportive offers something for every type of rider.



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JULY

- 24 Wiggle Mega Meon, Hampshire
- 31 Wiggle The Only Way, Essex
- 31 Wiggle Hell of Hexham, Northumberland

AUGUST

- 6 Wiggle Bournemouth, Dorset
- 7 Wiggle Haywards Heath Howler, E. Sussex
- 20 Wiggle Yorkshire Tour, North Yorkshire
- 21 Wiggle Cotswolds, Gloucestershire

SEPTEMBER

- 4 Wiggle Northern Angel, Newcastle
- 11 Wiggle French Le Tricolore, Dover-Calais
- 17 Wiggle Steeple Chase, Cambridgeshire
- 24 Wiggle New Forest 100, Hampshire
- 25 Wiggle New Forest 100, Hampshire

OCTOBER

- 1 Wiggle Ay Up, North Yorkshire
- 2 Wiggle South Downs 100, West Sussex
- 9 Wiggle Forest Ranger, Staffordshire
- 15 Wiggle Exmouth Ex-terminator, Devon
- 23 Wiggle Circuit Breaker, Northants
- 29 Wiggle Devils Punch, Hampshire
- 30 Wiggle Royal Flyer, Norfolk

NOVEMBER

- 6 Wiggle Hellfire Corner, Kent
- 12 Wiggle Purbeck Hill-a-Saurus, Dorset
- 13 Wiggle Bitter Beast, Dorset
- 19 Wiggle Snowball Spinner, Warwickshire
- 26 Wiggle Fallen Leaves, West Sussex
- 27 Wiggle Fontwell Freeze, West Sussex

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Tour of Cambridgeshire

Peterborough Arena **June 5, 2016**

Paul Waite

Distance 84 miles **Time** 3hr 28min **Average speed** 24mph

A close friend had ridden the ToC in 2015 and had qualified in our age group to ride the Worlds. He actually went to Denmark and raced for GB in the 50-54 category. It sounded like good fun, a huge field, plenty of wheels to sit behind and be towed around a fast 'flat' 84-mile loop.

I had raced for nearly 20 years and stopped when I was 47. However, when I turned 50 last year I decided to give racing another go, and entered four local races.

Targeting the ToC

In January of this year I found myself looking for a career change. I was fortunate to be able to take several months off work and used that time to increase my weekly mileage; most weeks averaging over 200 miles with some weeks exceeding 300.

The ToC looked almost like the perfect race for me — a little lumpy in places and with the constant threat of crosswinds in the Fens.

But 84 miles is a long way to ride, never mind race; there's no time to stop at the feed stations if you're racing! In the event I rode with two 750ml bottles, three gels and one energy bar. Despite the sun shining throughout the race, I only drank about a litre and consumed the energy bar and two gels. I probably should have drunk more but the pace of the race makes you forget — I felt good, though, and didn't suffer from cramp or dehydration.

On the day

The event is really well organised but to ensure that I was near the front of my age group I arrived at our starting pen two hours in advance. We had over 200 riders in our age category and I did not want to be stuck at the back. I wasn't the only one with this idea and by 10.30am there were another 100 or so riders in our pen.

The race started and straight away we were doing



25mph. I decided that I would try and stay in the top 20-30 riders for as long as possible. I was apprehensive at first but quickly realised the changes in pace were manageable; I even tried a cheeky attack within the first few miles but was quickly brought back.

Approaching the final few miles it became obvious that a bunch sprint finish was on the cards. Having managed to stay near the front all day it now became a real battle to fight for position and it was amazing to see all these new

faces suddenly appear as the final kilometre approached. There was some frantic jostling for position in the final 500 metres and the finish line seemed to appear really quickly. By the line I think I was in the top 15.

I was confident that I could finish within the top 25 per cent of my age group and qualify for the Worlds. Going to Australia isn't really an option, it's just too far. Next year the Worlds are in France so I'm intending to ride next year and qualify again.

Three to try Flat century sportives

Cycling Weekly The Arrow

May

DISTANCE 101 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 759M (LONG)

Taking place on the flat roads of Lincolnshire and the surrounding area, this century (plus a mile) sees you ascend towards the end but doesn't throw up too many climbs, meaning it's a good one for a target time. www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk/events/cycling-weekly-the-arrow-sportive

Flat and fast 100

June

DISTANCE 100 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 401M (LONG)

Held in Thorne, South Yorkshire, this event is designed to allow riders to target a fast century but there's also a 100km option as well. With a mere 400 metres of climbing this could be a day to target a PB. sportivehq.com

Wiggle Royal Flyer

October

DISTANCE 71 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 684M (LONG)

This late season Norfolk-based sportive takes in the Royal Sandringham Estate and the tree-lined avenues around it. You'll fly through the autumnal leaves on the ground before crossing the finish line for a well-earned end-of-season break. www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk



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SKS Rennkompressor £74.99

SKS celebrates 50 years of iconic tyre inflation with an anniversary model

All right, so a track pump isn't the most glamorous product we could have put in this section, but this one is special. With its wooden handle, flip-up feet and brick-solid build, the Rennkompressor is an iconic piece of equipment that most of us will have owned, used or hankered after at some point. This year the Rennkompressor pump turns 50 and so in celebration of that SKS has released a small run of 5,000 floor pumps worldwide.

Each of the 5,000 retro-style pumps will be numbered. Ours here is number 4276, and features the original red colour from 1966, made from steel tubing with a cast iron base and metal flip-up feet. It does reach 16 bar (230psi), but unless you are going for the Hour record you'll probably never want to go that high.

If you did want to keep this for aesthetic reasons then you're well catered for — it also has a leather wall mount, poster and certificate, so you can admire and reminisce.

Words: Symon Lewis Photo: Chris Catchpole

“How can we reset the epic-o-meter for events that warrant the label”



An arms race of adjectives has devalued our vocabulary and left us literally lost for words to express extreme experiences, reveals *Simon Warren* in an epic broadside...

Epic route, epic ride, epic climb, epic descent, epic this, epic that, ENOUGH EPIC ALREADY! Before long getting out of bed will be ‘epic’. Then what? Two minutes into the day and you will have peaked, reached a zenith that you will not and cannot match for the next 12 hours before you pass out after maybe an ‘epic’ night out. I’m no lexicographer — indeed, I had to look that word up — but I’ve reached breaking point where it comes to the overuse of the word ‘epic’.

The dictionary tells us that when utilised as an adjective, the ‘E’ word should be employed to describe something that’s heroic, or grand in scale or character — so not everything under the sun like it does today. Now, I’m not ranting at anyone in particular here, nor am I setting out to belittle the achievements of riders’ weekend heroics. I know that when I started riding even 10 miles seemed like a significant challenge, and a 50-mile ride something that seemed like an outrageous impossibility. But were they epic? No they weren’t, they were just bike rides. Epic is trekking to the North Pole solo while dragging three months’ supply of food, or crossing the Pacific on a raft with just your hands as paddles.

The misuse and overuse of epic is of course a by-product of the world we now live in where in order to simply sell something it *must* be bigger, better, more ‘epic’ than what came before just to attract the attention of the customer. Because the customer’s an idiot, right? The customer will only part with his or her money if it is epic, has a big red flash on it, smacks them in the face and shouts as loud as it possibly can.

I am lucky enough to have actually seen epic in the flesh and that is a key reason why I’m so angry. A few summers ago I rode 100 mountains in France while compiling my book on the climbs of the Tour and I made the decision to save, to reserve, the special word for just one single climb. In reality I could have labelled them all with it, or certainly 75 per

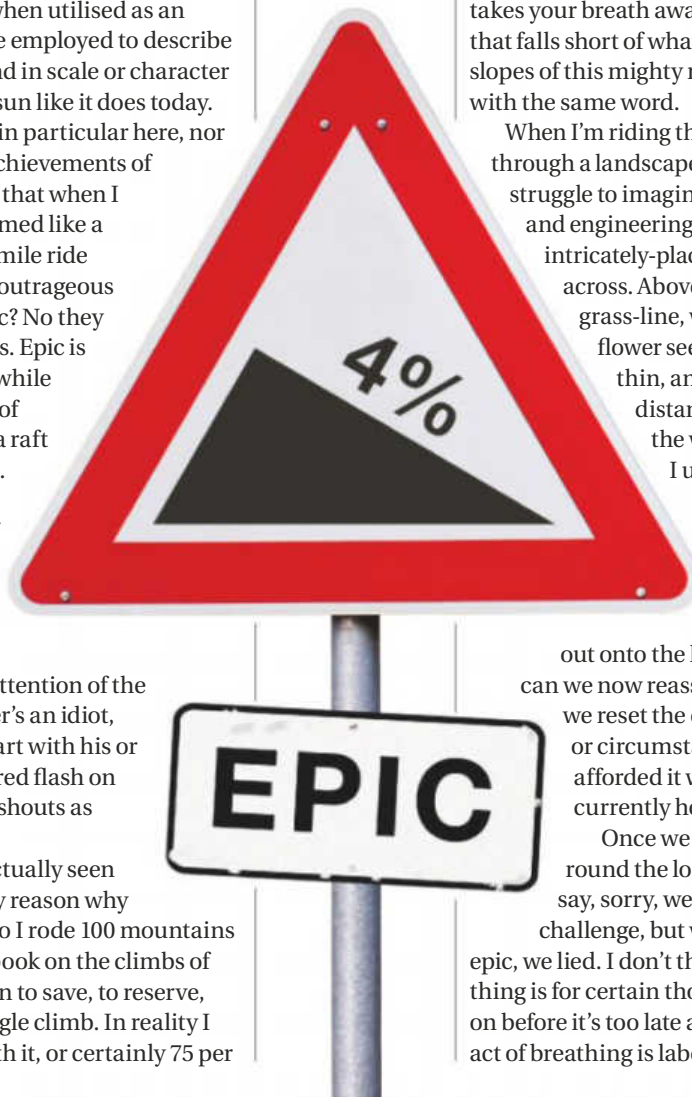
cent of them, but then would I have needed another post-epic category for the special one. Thing is there isn’t a post-epic. We can’t have an epic A-star like the exam boards dreamt up to massage the figures and reward more teachers and schools with A grades. No, epic is the pinnacle and that’s why I kept it for one climb, the peerless Col de Bonette.

It isn’t the hardest (that would be labelled the most brutal or savage) and it isn’t the longest or steepest, but it is the very definition of epic. It’s grandeur simply takes your breath away, and quite frankly anything that falls short of what you experience on the higher slopes of this mighty mountain cannot be described with the same word.

When I’m riding this pass, high up in the clouds, through a landscape that even Hollywood would struggle to imagine; as I marvel at the endeavour and engineering that created such a canvas, such intricately-placed curves and *lacets* for me to toil across. Above the tree-line, above even the grass-line, where only a type of small purple flower seems to survive. Where the air is thin, and the sky is within touching distance, where you truly feel on top of the world — then, and only then, can I use the ‘E’ word.

So it’s quite clear that we have a problem. We’ve driven the bus of hyperbole into the cul-de-sac of upselling and we can’t turn it round to back it out onto the highway of common sense. How can we now reassess the classifications; how can we reset the epic-o-meter so that *only* events or circumstances that warrant the label are afforded it without devaluing those that currently hold it?

Once we tell folks that 75km of pootling round the local lanes is epic, how do we then say, sorry, we were wrong, it will be a challenge, but we must apologise, it won’t be epic, we lied. I don’t think I have the answer yet. One thing is for certain though, we have to put the brakes on before it’s too late and the simple and subconscious act of breathing is labelled as ‘epic’.



NEXT MONTH Simon tells us about the result of his annual trip to Alpe d Huez

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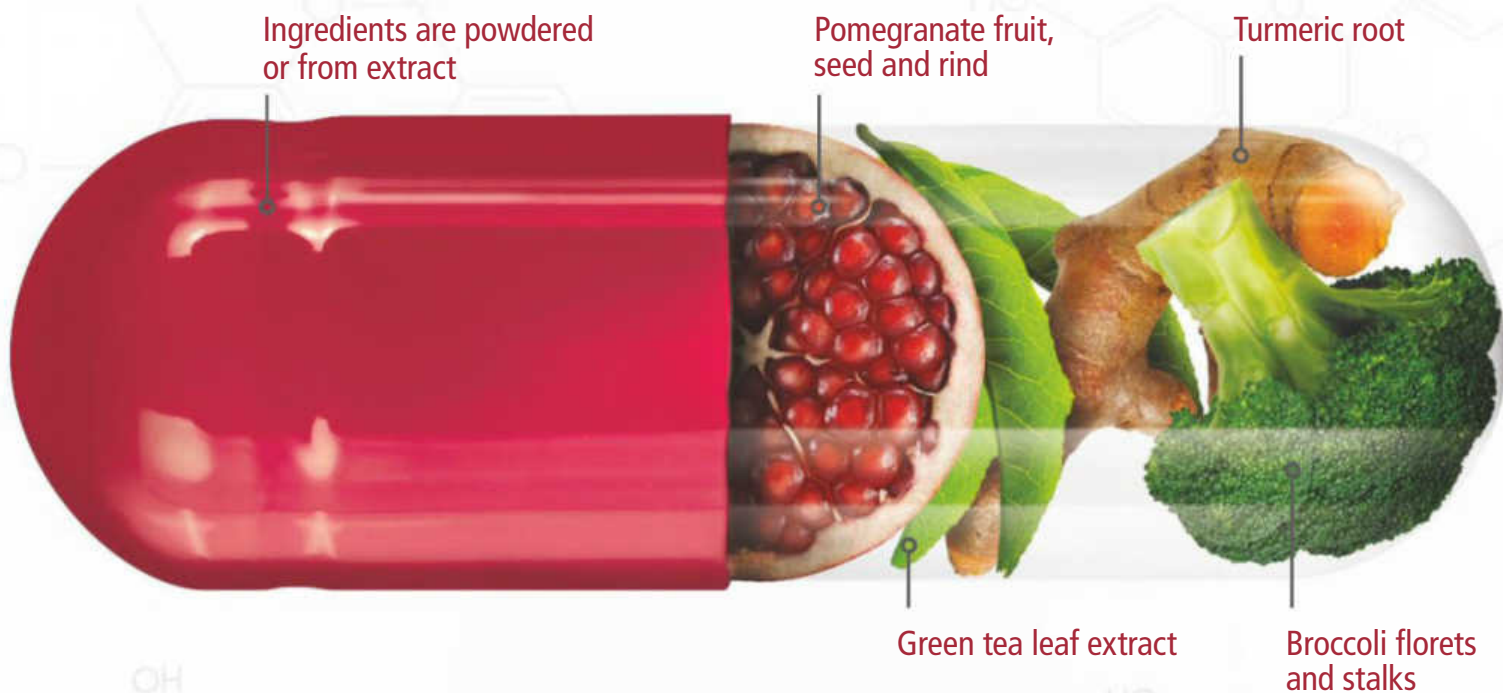
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"I have brought sausages to a sword fight and now I'm paying the price"



This month *Brett Lewis* struggles up a Welsh mountain, has his backside breathed on by a dragon and comes home to ridicule and mockery from his wife. Well, we've all been there...

It's 85 degrees Fahrenheit but it might as well be a 100. It's the first hot day of the year and I'm struggling in the heat. I'm also halfway up a two-mile climb on a Welsh mountain, there's no shade, no cooling breeze and no cloud cover.

I've had to stop and sit under the only tree in the vicinity to get some shade and attempt to cool down. The half a bidon of water I poured down my neck and back hasn't helped and now I'm annoyed that I've wasted that much water — there are still 20 miles to ride until the next food stop and more water.

A large sheep and a surprisingly large ewe wanders across the road to look at me. They are both completely unfazed by my presence, the heat or constant stream of equally hot riders passing by. But I'm the only rider that has stopped and that's also beginning to annoy me.

A passing rider narrowly misses the sheep but calls out to me: "You alright? We've a long way to go..." and continues on his way. He's not wrong, we are only 70 miles into the 142-mile Gran Fondo L'Etape Wales Dragon Ride and there are still a few mountains to climb.

The route takes us through the Brecon Beacons National Park where scenery is heroic, brutal and glorious. The mountain climbs have great names, Rhigos, Bwlch, Devil's Elbow and Black Mountain. All of them should be shown respect and any other day I would love every minute of this route, savour the climbs and relish the glory of the descents.

But today I seem to have brought sausages to the sword fight and now I'm paying the price. My pace is well below my usual and I've already blown my self-imposed finishing target time. I've also blown my legs, my middle is completely numb, my backside is strangely hot and I'm desperate for a pee.

I climb back on my bike and decide to ride through my pain and tell myself that the quicker I get through this the happier I'll be on the other side.

Dressing up in your wife's clothes is an easy, and very honest mistake. Right Brett?



The most spectacular climb of the day comes at around 100 miles on the Gran Fondo route, it's the four-mile long Black Mountain. In my pitiful state I winch my way up, turn of the crank by turn of the crank. I make the summit but it's not been a good climb for me, I'm a mess, my bibs are salt-stained and I can feel the sweat pouring down my back. But the view from the top is stunning. There are small crowds by the roadside clanking cow-bells and it's hard to believe that we are in Wales and not on an Alpine mountainside.

I'm still trying to work out what's happened to my legs and my middle. As we're all cyclists here I can share this with you, I feel like I've been breathed on by the dragon and my backside is on fire — not just an annoying itch or an uncomfortable twinge, it's a full-on raging firestorm.

Ten hours and 142 miles after the start I finally make it over the finish line. I'm relieved to see my car in the car park and after an uncomfortable three-hour drive I make it home.

My wife's waiting for me and she's not happy. It's nothing to do with my late arrival home but a missing piece of her new cycling kit. She pulls out the salt encrusted bibs from my kit bag that I'd just thrown on the floor and reads out aloud, 'Made in Italy, Ladies Medium'. Just like a Scooby Doo cartoon unveiling I get flashbacks of wriggling into them in the dark and half asleep. Why hadn't I noticed the grey colour didn't match my jersey or the padding felt different or the pink logo or the thin straps or indeed why they finished halfway up my legs and not near my knees as they should have done. I ask her to promise not to tell anyone that I've just ridden 142 miles in her two-sizes-too-small-for-me bibshorts but she's too busy guffawing with laughter to listen.

It seems like I may still have a way to go on my journey to becoming a cyclist.

NEXT MONTH: Brett gatecrashes a local sportive



This is not just a great moment, it's a great moment in an incredible week. Sean Kelly has caught the leading two riders, Alain Bondue and Gregor Braun, and gone straight to the front. Kelly is followed by a Belgian, Rudy Rogiers, who bridged to the leading pair with him, and Bondue and Braun are now hanging on. There's still some way to go, but Kelly is on a mission; a mission that began a week ago in defeat.

That was the Tour of Flanders, where Kelly started as the number one favourite. Everybody based their race on him, and on the penultimate climb, the Muur Van Geraardsbergen, Kelly attacked. Only five riders could follow, and once over the top they took turns to attack him, but Kelly countered them. Then there was a lull, and that's when the least favoured, Johan Lammerts, played the only tactical card he had; he went for a long one.

Kelly refused to chase, and so did everyone else because they didn't want to take the fast-finishing Irishman to the finish. Lammerts rode away to victory. Kelly said a lot of things after the finish, most of them in the heat of the moment, but one thing he really meant, and that was: "I will get my revenge next week in Paris-Roubaix."

Kelly could have ridden Ghent-Wevelgem in the interim, but his team manager, Jean De Gribaldy, sent him to the Tour of the Basque Country stage race instead. He wanted Kelly out of the cobbled Classics bubble; it was boiling with speculation, and the press would have hounded him in northern Europe.

Kelly could have ghosted around the Basque Country race, which started the day after the Tour of Flanders, instead he won four stages and the overall.

It finished on Friday, and the following day Kelly flew to Paris for Paris-Roubaix. The cobbles were atrocious for the 1984 edition as it had rained for days before the race. Alain Bondue, a local rider, attacked just before the Forest of Arenberg, where there was carnage when the peloton arrived. Kelly picked his way through it then set off in pursuit of Bondue, who had been joined by his German team-mate Braun. They were world-class pursuiter and Kelly, a great time triallist, had to catch them.

He did it, and when he hit the front Braun was quickly dropped. Bondue held on for longer, but soon Kelly had only Rogiers with him. Rogiers couldn't sprint and Kelly was one of the best. The finish on the Velodrome in Roubaix was a formality; Kelly won Paris-Roubaix.





“The cobbles were atrocious in 1984; it had rained for days”

Words: Chris Sidwells Photo: Cycling Weekly archive





***Andrew Dilkes* tackles this tough Peak District ride packed with the National Park's finest climbs and views**



“It smells like race day”, said the other half. She was right; it did. A combination of hot coffee and chamois cream gave an aroma reminiscent of a village hall race HQ. I was, in fact, heading out the door to hook up with an old mate of mine, Nick Craig.

I don't recall ever being apprehensive about a ride with a mate, well not since I was a junior turning up for my first club run with toe clips and straps and a pair of Ron Hills tucked in my socks. Nick Craig isn't any old ride mate, he is a prolific winner and all-round mountain bike and cyclo-cross legend, as well as having a reputation as being one of the nicest people in bike racing.

We're about to head out for what in theory will be a jolly nice jaunt across the Peak District. It's a bit of a pilgrimage back to my youth. I've bored most of my southern riding mates to death with tales of “there was this one time, on 66-inch fixed...”, and “riding up the Cat & Fiddle used to make us strong, but coming down doing 200rpm gave us fast legs”. And here I am, having just moved back north with the family, keen to recce the old training roads and see if the south really has made me soft in the 15 years I've lived there.

I'd seen a ride that takes in most of the National Park, and a sudden impulse made me suggest riding it to an old mate of mine, Nick Craig. Once he was game I knew there was no turning back. The giddy excitement of rolling back the clock had gradually been replaced by my slight concern that I was

about to get served a great big can of 'whoop ass' across them there hills by that evergreen mate of mine.

Nick and I go way back when we used to train together 20 years ago. Our rides consisted of the great and the good of the local scene, hosting the likes of national and

international riders like Will Wright and Hamish Haynes with the occasional appearance from Rob Hayles. You'll probably be familiar with his frequent TV appearances these days, but of course he was no stranger to the steps of the World and Olympic podium in his racing days. A lot of us were, at one time or another, coached by Harold Nelson and many of the riders that went through the 'establishment' progressed to fame and fortune in the pro ranks. Nick

got a call from the British Cycling Federation, as it was then, and a star was born.

I, as one of the more 'hanging on' riders, dutifully went off to uni with the hopes of getting a 'proper job'. Nick went on to achieve greatness winning multiple national cyclo-cross and MTB championships and racing internationally as a mountain biker along with appearances on the road for Great Britain at the Olympics. He still wins, well, nearly everything.

Memory lane

Having found the 170km epic Seashell Trust ride covered all my old training roads, and a lot more, Nick and I decided that if we were going to do it, we'd do it properly and start at the start. Having arrived first at our rendezvous looking for Nick's car, I'm hardly surprised to see him roll in on the bike — he's ridden out. Along with riding home, it'll mean an extra 40km on top of today's ride for him. I shake my head laughing at his foolhardy approach. I'd reced some of the route a couple of weeks ago and I know I'm going to feel every inch of the 2,793 metres of climbing. I give a cheery hello and a back slap, and then, realising that Nick's had a very nice warm-up, shove an additional couple of Skratch Labs hydration sachets and chews in my pocket.

Wagons roll, and we're gassing like a couple of fishwives — there have been a lot of cycling-related headlines recently, and we're keen to discuss the gossip. But before we get to the really juicy bits, heavy

breathing interrupts the conversational flow — we are met with stretches of ascent straight out of the starting gate.

Imperceptible at first, but once out beyond Poynton you definitely start to notice it. In the distance you can just see the big hills in

range, it's an impressive sight alright and I make a mental note to keep my powder dry for as long as possible.

Out the other side of Poynton the road tips rudely upwards and it stays like this for quite a while as we gain elevation. Our first challenge for the day is the famous Brickworks climb. It's not too severe but serves to get us properly warmed up. If we needed any further reminders of who has pedigree here, a quick

THE RIDERS

Nick Craig
Evergreen
MTB and
cyclo-cross
maestro.



Multiple national champion across disciplines along with Olympic participation and international duties on the World Cup circuit. Known as the nicest man in cycling.

Andrew Dilkes



A long-term rider who has dabbled in pretty much every cycling discipline from track and time trials to road and cyclo-cross. He's ridden all over Europe, and is about to embark on a huge mountain bike stage race in Canada.

“Having moved back to the north I was keen to see if the south had softened me up”





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**Ticking off another hill,
but at least the sun's out**

look at our Strava times reveals all, with Nick a whole two minutes quicker, at 6min 30sec, than me at my best. A stark reminder that today could be a tough one.

Up and up

The top of the Brickworks yields some spectacular views, but there's little time to admire them as we have much ground to cover, and it's a quick plunge into Kettleshulme before we're climbing again. Up toward the local climbing Mecca of Windgather rocks — it's another mighty vista, but no sooner are we at the top, we're hurtling downwards again, this time into the Goyt Valley. We're given a momentary respite along the side of the reservoir, before once more clicking up through the gears for the climb out. It's actually an enjoyable ascent; the gradient is fairly steady with the added bonus of

“We're steadily chalking up the miles and the sun is finally starting to burn through the morning haze”

being a one-way road. Nick and I are able to cruise up fairly easily, yet still catch folk hand over fist all the way to the top.

Up, over and ever onwards. Heading for Flash (the highest village in Britain no less) is a brief opportunity to recover and for the first time all day we're blessed with a tailwind. It doesn't last long, and the hills keep coming thick and fast. Nick is clearly having a cracking day out in his familiar stomping ground and like a cycling equivalent of an open top bus tour guide he's giving lots of “Oh, have you been down there? Oh, that's an horrendous climb” commentary.

We're steadily chalking up the miles and the sun is finally starting to burn though the morning haze and warming up a treat. Longnor is where it all starts to get new for me, I'm not familiar with any of the next 40 miles, and I'm not sure if riding blind up the next lot of hills is going to be a good or a bad thing.

“How are the legs?” Nick asks. This is no time for talking myself up, as bar the one section of tail,

**And saviour of the
universe, apparently**





Flossy was deeply unimpressed by the two interlopers

the wind had been firmly in our faces all day. I'm not talking about a gentle shampoo-advert breeze, I'm talking wind-tunnel levels, the kind that when you do eventually find respite, it feels as though you've just exited a noisy nightclub.

So I reply with an honest: "They're a bit sore but OK."

"Do you want to 'sit in' on the windier sections?" he suggests

Yes. Yes I do.

More than swallowing my pride, I'm positively gulping it down in massive chunks. Reprieve I think. Alas no, as no sooner am I tucked in on Nick's wheel and have made myself as compact as possible — for he doesn't displace much air — he is steadily dropping down the cassette. Click, click, click. Er... hang on. My heart rate is climbing again and he starts to ramp up the pace. It's now just as unpleasant as it was riding in the wind, however we're now covering the ground way faster. To be fair, I have, up to now, been deliberately trying to hold back. I've not ridden 100 miles in this esteemed company and terrain for many moons. I've been telling myself not to get carried away, as I don't want to expire part way round in a hideous mess of sweat and snot and tears. I'm pleased that I'm managing to hold my own, and I'm putting a fair amount of this down to the Skratch Labs hydration and energy chews I'm munching throughout the ride.

We're now 50 miles in and after a blast down the B5056, where I'm lured into a false sense of "I've got this in the bag" security, we hang a right, and stop to refill bottles and eat enough food to be considered

lunch. Just ahead of us is a ford through Bradbourne Brook of reasonable width and unknown depth. Nick is still as fresh as an excitable puppy.

Let's off-road!

"Come on Dilkes, let's go through that!" he suggests. It's got 'incident' written all over it and I reply with a "No thanks. I've seen how these things unfold, I'm taking the bridge." I suggest it would make a great shot to deflect attention from me being nesh.

We set off, Nick through the ford and I on the bridge. Halfway through the ford, Nick discovers a rather large submerged hole with his front wheel. Nick, doing what Nick does best, then tries to bunny-hop said hole with his rear wheel. The water has other ideas and in the commotion that ensues, a bottle escapes, there's a bang and I hear the telltale rush of escaping air, but on this occasion, accompanied by the gurgle of water with each revolution of the wheel — not unlike a rather soggy, disappointing Catherine wheel.

Nick reaches dry land, then promptly wades back in, in his shoes, to retrieve his bottle that's currently floating around in the middle of the water. "I bet you were thinking



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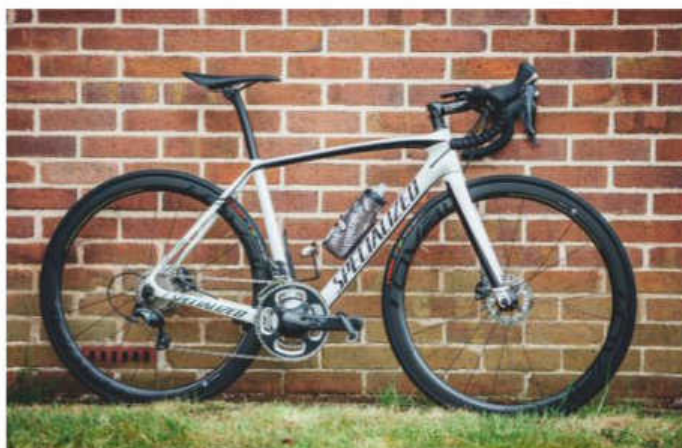
Low-lying valleys offer tranquility, beauty... and a long, tough slog out

what a prat, weren't you?", he says. I laugh, feeling smug about dry shoes.

My one-upmanship doesn't last long, as once the puncture is fixed and we're rolling again, I discover my legs aren't quite as happy as they once were. What felt like a slight leg awareness, has been replaced by what can only be described as cafe legs and they're close to deciding that they're done for the day.

THE BIKE

The Specialized Tarmac Disc was ideal for this little outing. Sprightly enough for the climbs, reassuring on the descents, with excellent stopping power from the discs. No effort wasted in forward propulsion with the added bonus of 40mm deep-section aero hoops.



Upon reaching the Derbyshire Village of Tissington, we find ourselves slap bang in the middle of its well-dressing festival — a Derbyshire tradition of decorating the village wells. It's the first time we've had any real contact with people and traffic all day and it's a welcomed lull in the pace to help get my legs going again.

We press onwards and upwards. Onto Thorpe and a great descent down to Ilam, which reveals the breathtaking scenery of the Dovedale National Nature Reserve. Towering escarpments and a teeny tiny ridge running across them high in the sky. It's here Nick tells me how, while he was running a fell race lower down in the valley, cycling star and friend of Nick's, David Millar, was tasked with looking after Nick's kids. Apparently he took them to the top of the ridge, a rather technical slog especially given their tender age at the time. Turns out the kids ended up looking after him. Nick laughs, "you know what cyclists are like, not the steadiest of people on their feet". Suffice to say David wasn't asked to carry out childminding duties again — although I suspect this was probably his plan.

The climb out of Ilam is unpleasant and seems to go on for far longer than I'd have liked it to. I'm swinging on the bars like some demented ape and all thought of cruising round masquerading as a fellow pro has vanished. My composure has been replaced with gurning.

Onwards, ever onwards. Stanshope, Hope, another climb up to Alstonfield and onto Hulme End. My legs have somehow managed to ride

themselves into recovery and, although are by no means fresh, their constant hurting has been replaced by a contented hum.

Nick points out a small white house on the far hill. “That’s Flash over there”. Is it indeed. That means we’re nearly back on familiar roads and for the first time I stop thinking about blowing as I now know what’s coming and it’s reassuring.

Impressive vista

Across the open Staffordshire moorlands we push still with the ever-present buffeting of the prevailing wind and across the A53 at the Winking Man pub heading for the Roaches, which is, judging by the number of cars present, a favourite hang out of the surrounding towns. The ice cream van is doing a roaring trade. Rounding the corner a spectacular view of Staffordshire unfolds before you. It feels like the top of the world here and there is plenty of descending in the next few miles to allow some recovery.

It’s amazing how the miles just roll over as you chat on a ride and we suddenly find ourselves heading for the last big climb of the day, Gun Hill — a famous climb that has featured in the Tour of Britain. In all honesty, I find it easier than I thought,

even if it does drag on a bit. I dare say it would be very much different under race conditions, when you’re having to dance to someone else’s beat.

These roads formed part of Nick’s old 72-mile training loop from when he was a pro rider. He once rode it eight days on the bounce to get a good block of training in. Which to me is total madness, but explains why Nick was a pro and I wasn’t.

It’s here, Nick tells me, quite matter-of-factly, that he was responsible for the advent of lock-out on suspension forks. This is a big deal as it’s a feature found on practically every set of suspension forks sold. I’m a little bit stunned. Apparently while racing the Mountain Bike World Cups he was sponsored by



“There’s a bang followed by the rush of escaping air, and a gurgle of water with each revolution of the wheel”



A momentary lapse of reason sees Andy half-wheeling Nick



Early season cross practice



Damp, deflated but still smiling



Homeward bound on
the way to the Roaches

fork manufacturer Manitou and was approached by their top dog to ask why he kept requesting more resistance in the fork.

The ex-motocross guys were proud of their buttery movement, but Nick, not wanting to waste the energy being soaked up by the constantly active fork, asked if they could lock them out. An engineer is ushered over. "Can we add a lock out to these", "Er, sure". "Whereabouts? On the bars". "No just there on the top of the fork leg is fine", replies Nick.

This story of pioneering invention is no big deal to Nick, and not something he shouts about, but it's another reminder of his legendary status in the cycling world.

KNOW THIS

Clothes

This is the North-West so anything could happen. Manchester isn't known as the rainy city for nothing. Take kit to cover all eventualities and pay close heed to the forecast.

Climbing

Take your time. Once you start the gradients come thick and fast and some of them are steep. If you get too giddy you'll be in a right state by halfway.

Accommodation

There is an abundance of places to

stay in the south of Manchester and given its proximity to the airport you'll find countless hotel rooms waiting for your custom. Plenty of B&Bs and Air BnB options are also available.

Eating

Fuel up. This is a big day out. Make sure you have plenty of food about you, some money as well as there is the odd shop en route. Imbibe liquid. Grinding up the climbs will stress those muscles and they won't need any excuse to cramp up.

Beyond Meerbrook we're hit by a series of short but stinging little climbs through Danebridge and Wincle. It's all very pretty scenery, but harsh on wearying limbs.

"You're not gonna blow up now are you?" I'm asked. I gamble with a "Probably not", response. My legs are brimming with lactate acid, but I know there's not much climbing left.

I just hope my legs can carry me back before totally exploding.

Smashed but not destroyed

The terrain is rolling, although not sufficient enough to put a dent in Nick's pace. We're both feeling the pull of home, and having found some reserve in the tanks, we start speeding back up, chipping along at close to 20mph.

We re-enter civilization and the volume of traffic is building again. It's a stark reminder that, bar the bustling village of Tissington, we've had the car-free lanes to ourselves for much of the day. Before long, we're back at our morning's rendezvous point.

There's no elaborate finish, or sitting around dissecting the ride like us cyclists love to do. It's just a quick celebratory high-five and Nick's off for his 25km ride home.

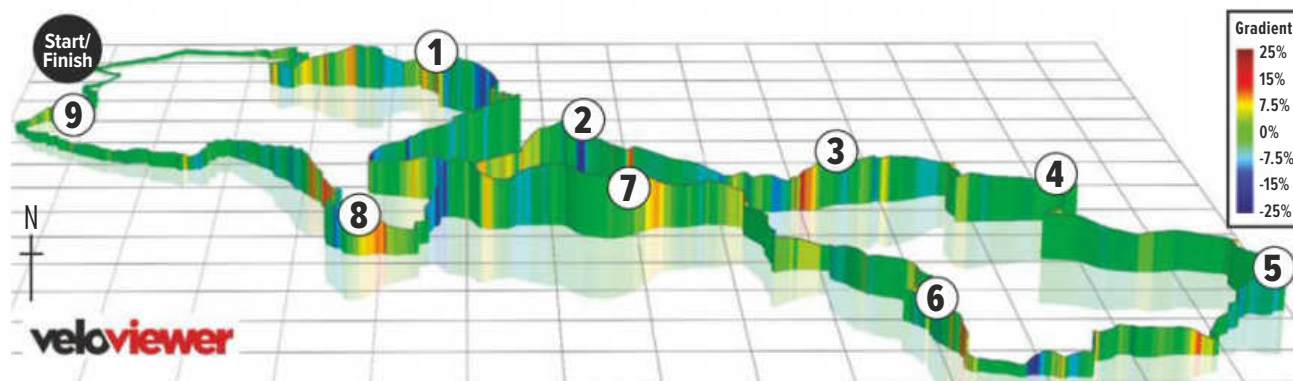
I retire to the car and grub around for yet more food. A crusty, salty shell of my earlier self, contentedly smashed but not destroyed.

In the end Nick went easy on me. He could have had me on the ropes all day had he chosen to, but that's not Nick's style. Being the gent that he is, he'll only hurt you when he needs to.

THE ROUTE & KEY CLIMBS

Event entry includes a goodie bag and free tea and cake at the finish, which also has parking and showering facilities. There are three feed stations on the route, plus mobile

mechanic support. All entry fees go directly to the Seashell Trust, a charity providing a happy and secure environment for children and adults with learning disabilities.



For a Veloviewer link go to <http://veloviewer.com/routes/5476918>

CLIMBS

1 The Brickworks 2.6km / 6%
The gradient changes almost constantly. Perhaps don't try for the sub-6min KOM today.

2 Side End Lane 3.1km / 6%
A writhing climb with many changes of gradient. The 8.31 KOM is quick riding indeed.

3 Goyt Valley 4.4km / 3%
A steady gradient that is one-way so you shouldn't — shouldn't — meet any cars head-on. A rapid 8.23 is top of the 7,000 attempts.

4 Flash 1.3km / 5.7%
Climb up to the highest town in Britain at an eye-watering 456m. You have 3.24 to beat.

5 Crowdecote 0.8km / 9.3%
This looms on the horizon for some time. Steep and unrelenting. Take it steady

6 Ilam 2.3km / 7.2%
This is a relatively long one which, at 7.2 per cent average, will make you wince a bit.

7 Gun Hill 2km / 6.5%
With its Tour of Britain credentials you know this one will be tough. 5.22 is the KOM.

8 Wincle 2.5km / 6%
Don't be tempted into the brewery — there may be no return.

9 Birtle Lane 2.6km / 3.1%
If you're struggling at this point Birtle Lane will deliver the coup de grâce. The gradient isn't scary but it does drag on.

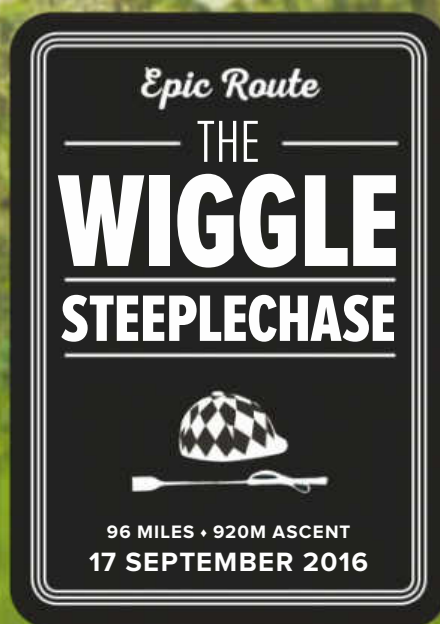


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➤ Route map and profile is available at www.seashelltrustsportive.org.uk





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Impenetrable cloud cover
and genteel scenery exclusive
to good Old Blighty

Painting a picture of his vision of Britain, John Major famously conjured up images of long shadows falling across cricket grounds, warm beer, and in George Orwell's words, "old maids bicycling". Within five miles of starting this ride we can tick off the former prime minister's checklist — the cricket ground, the pub, the old maids on bikes... feel free to insert your own punchline.

Perhaps it's no coincidence that the early miles of the Wiggle Steeple Chase sportive traverse Sir John's old constituency of Huntingdon. It's an area of outstanding English loveliness, yet modest and unstarry; think Adele rather than Mariah Carey, Kate Winslet not Julia Roberts. This isn't a heroic landscape of snow-capped mountains or cliffs that plunge to the ocean, but all that geological big-headedness isn't, well, very

"We're lifted over four lanes of traffic onto a lane flanked by nettles and wild grass"

Photographs: Roo Fowler

English. Instead, this is a bucolic bliss of trees and hedges, of green fields and well-tended gardens, of country villages more flawless than Hollywood would dare create, each with an ancient church.

Ah yes, the churches that make this ride's name so appropriate. The towers, spires and steeples that seem ever present somewhere in the 360-degree panorama as we start in Cambridgeshire, pedal through Northamptonshire then Bedfordshire before returning to Cambs. Ahead lie 96 miles with enough undulations to trouble the little chainring, but without striking the fear into our legs.

Into rural England

With me is my immediate next door neighbour Zac, a podium-bothering duathlete and triathlete. While I might feign shivers at club ride coffee stops, in the hope that another rider says, "Oh, are you cold? I thought you were looking thin. Have you lost weight?", Zac really is that lean, hence his arm-warmers as we start this ride on an overcast day. We leave behind the ghostly-quiet Huntingdon Race Course, hop over the A14, and cruise through Brampton. A small bridge lifts us over four lanes of thundering traffic on the A1 and drops us onto a singletrack road, flanked by shoulder-high cow parsley,

THE RIDERS

Jonathan Manning

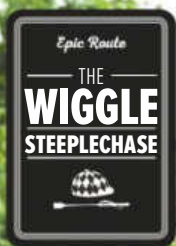
A freelance writer and mustard-keen cyclist, Jonathan's palmarès includes the mountainous Etape du Tour and Haute Route, the cobbled Omloop Het Nieuwsblad and the punishing Fred Whitton. He's never come close to a podium.



Zac Pywell

A highly competitive duathlete and triathlete, Zac won bronze in his age group (20-24) at the 2016 ETU Duathlon European Championships in Germany. Cycling is his strongest discipline, and his focus is half iron-distance races this year.





The Steeple Chase
features a parcours
of pastoral perfection

nettles and wild grass, backed by dense hawthorn and blackthorn hedges. The contrast between this head-clearing peace and the roaring Great North Road is as dramatic as it is delightful. As yoga instructors unfailingly seem to say at the start of a class, “Deep breath, and relax...”

Dilly-dally in the shadows

We skirt the footings of Grafham Water, catch the briefest glimpse of Grafham village church, sail past a field of linseed as blue as the Mediterranean, and dive headlong down a double-digit descent on our way to Kimbolton.

A school in magnificent grounds stands at the edge of town, gatekeeper to a high street of shops, cafes and pubs rendered in bright colours. At the end of a street an ancient oak lynchgate stands before the stunning St Andrew’s Church, and as we dilly-dally in its shadow, a woman emerges from the Old Swan Pharmacy opposite.

“Are you boys lost or knackered?” she calls out.

Thankfully, her suggestion for a performance-enhancing uplift is breakfast at Oliver’s Cafe, further down the street, rather than anything from the back of the chemists. If only Lance Armstrong had refuelled on a full English rather than an apothecary’s arsenal, pro cycling’s reputation would be in a much better place.

Leaving Kimbolton, we pass an industrial estate built on a former airfield where the US Air Force’s 379th Bomb Group was stationed during the Second World War. A memorial commemorates their deadly exports, 330 bombing missions between 1943 and 1945, rather than their friendlier imports of the jitterbug, Coke and nylon stockings.

Immediately beyond is Harvard Industrial Estate, and I can’t resist swerving through its driveway.

“When I was at Harvard...” I joke to Zac.

We’re heading towards the square-towered church at Stow Longa as we pedal north. The moment its tower slips below the horizon

behind us, the steeple of Spaldwick’s church rises to guide our navigation. From here it’s a short hop over the A14 again and a chance to gloat at all the drivers beetling along a road that seems to feature daily in traffic bulletins. A short, sharp climb forces us out of the saddle and

delivers us to Barham (tiny, ancient church, no steeple) then on to Buckworth, where the tip of the spire claims to have been the highest point in Huntingdonshire for longer than seven centuries.

No wonder churches inspired the equine sport of steeplechasing, a hybrid of hunting and flat racing. The religious landmarks made obvious start and finish lines for horsemen to gallop cross-country, and there’s something deliciously subversive about gamblers adopting these places of worship as goalposts for their vice-fuelled sport.

On our skinny wheels we’ll have to leave such point-to-point riding to our knobbly-tyred, mountain biking brothers, but it does feel as if the

towers, spires and steeples are points in a giant dot-to-dot, connected by a trace of tarmac that leads us from Cambridgeshire into Northamptonshire. In these belt-tightening times of austerity it seems extraordinary that these tiny villages managed to fund such majestic buildings — today, I imagine, the Sunday collection barely covers the heating bills.

Crossing the county boundary also signals a change in village architecture. Geologists would identify Northamptonshire’s local stone as oolitic limestone, but in layman’s terms think honeyed Cotswold stone and you’re bang on the money. Some of the houses are drool-inducing; in Fotheringhay and Cotterstock there’s not a home that would look out of place in the opening pages of *Country Life*. There are royal connections, too, with Shakespeare’s hunchbacked villain Richard III born in Fotheringhay Castle, and Mary Queen of Scots beheaded there. The castle is long dismantled, its stone and timber used to build the Talbot Inn, in nearby Oundle.

Uncleat and admire the view

Fotheringhay church remains, however, and with its tower and octagonal lantern above it’s the most beautiful of any we see on this Steeple Chase. Zac and I uncleat for a moment as we cross the River Nene, to look back and admire the church perched above a water meadow.

The route planners of the Steeple Chase sportive suggest the ride’s elevation profile resembles “a collection of holy roof structures”, each short, sharp climb and steep descent represented as a steeple-shaped triangle. On the road, none are overly arduous. There are no sustained efforts or killer ascents, but there are just enough contours to separate one view from the next, as if each slightly breathless spell in the little chainring turns the page from one landscape to another. The subtlest changes of wind and gradient are enough to alter

our speed from a steady 17mph to a brisk 23mph, with no extra effort. There are few descents steep enough to induce braking or even stop pedalling, which means that by the time we reach Oundle we’re feeling pretty peckish.

The town feels like an Oxbridge outpost thanks to its handsome private school, and Beans Cafe fills the hole in our stomachs with coffee and cake. No one comments on my shivers, though, even when the rain starts. In a ride of two halves, the second will be under the shelter of waterproof jackets. Raindrops bead on the sun cream I applied to my knees this morning, and I can’t help smiling at the irony.

Morning Spa, Moss Blanket, Fresh Sage, Lichen, Arsenic, Buckingham, Enchanted Eden, Cooking Apple... there’s no end to the creativity of paint manufacturers when naming the palette of greens in their ranges, but there are infinitely more shades in this countryside. If there’s

“The elevation profile is said to resemble ‘a collection of holy roof structures’”

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Background Image © Imperial War Museum



Parish dash: en route to the next church

a silver lining to this heavy grey cloud, it's the depth and variety of natural colours in the hedgerows, fields and woods. With my Oakleys covered in spray it's a wonder I can see anything, light refracting like a kaleidoscope through hundreds of watery lenses — is this how flies see the world?

THE BIKE

This striking-looking bike is mesmerising in the flesh, a collection of squiggles, bends and curves bound into a race-winning frame. Not bad for a 'second' bike, but Zac's main ride is a TT frame for his duathlons and triathlons. He bought the Dogma both for training and for racing on hillier courses where the TT bike would be less competitive. The Pinarello is exceptionally stiff and light, its handling is very sharp for technical descents, and it's supremely comfortable over long distances. Zac has switched the seat for an ISM nose-less saddle for greater comfort, especially when riding on aero bars over long distances.



With visibility declining and spirits in danger of tumbling, Zac sparks up a conversation.

"So if you could have any bike in the world, what would it be?" he asks.

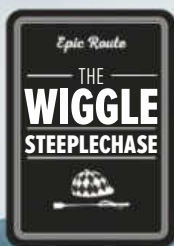
And so begins the creation of a pair of Dr Frankenstein's monsters, bars from one brand, saddles from another; Zac has his eyes on Enve wheels, I'd like to try the SRAM Red eTap gears; he wants an aero frame, while titanium remains an itch I need to scratch. The discussion is a fun diversion from the conditions and the fact that we're both on our 'Sunday best' bikes today, in honour of *Cycling Active* — normally, they would be left warm and dry in the garage on days like this, spared the biblical downpour, while our workhorse bikes faced the wrath of the heavens.

Straight outta Pilton

As we leave Pilton, the road straightens Roman-style, and nudged by a tailwind I can sense Zac's temptation to flatten his back and time trial the better part of 10 miles to the horizon. During university holidays he would return to the area, smash a handful of Strava KOMs, then steal away to his studies like a modern-day Scarlet Pimpernel. His focus is on half and full



"The road straightens and I sense Zac's temptation to time trial to the horizon"



More greens than B&Q:
the pair plough through
the mid-summer drizzle

iron distance triathlons, and even 50 miles into a ride he would normally be hurtling along roads like this, stretched out on aero bars. So it's something of a relief that I don't watch a fluoro yellow blur vanish into the distance.

Above us, a pair of beech trees interlock their branches to create an arch over the road and provide a brief umbrella from the downpour, before we're back into the puddles and wet, our speed and stopping distances increasing.

KNOW THIS

Getting there

The start and finish are at Huntingdon Race Course, less than a mile from the A1 and A14. It's a short ride along the B1514 from Huntingdon railway station.

Stay here

There is a Holiday Inn at Huntingdon Race Course, PE28 4NL. As we went to press, twin rooms were available for September 16 for £60, or £72 with breakfast (www.holidayinn.com).

Route profile

Rider reviews suggest that the Steeple Chase is a popular sportive for cyclists taking on their first

century ride. There are no easy 100-mile routes, but the absence of prolonged climbs makes this a manageable challenge, and you will still accumulate the better part of 900m (3,000 feet) during the course of the day. There are shorter routes of 48 and 61 miles if the epic distance feels out of reach.

Feed stations

There are three feed stations on the longer ride, but it's still worth packing gels or energy bars.

Timing

This is a non-competitive event, and the roads are open to traffic, but chip timing will record your speed.

The route sneaks into Bedfordshire, past more jaw-dropping houses, more churches, more steeples to chase, until we eventually rejoin the outward section of our route just south of Grafham Water.

Four shy of a century

And it's now that I finally manage to put a finger on a niggle that has been bugging me all day; the length of this ride. My legs are certainly telling me they're tired, but as I glance at my Garmin, the odometer has only crept up to 91 miles and I recall the official route finishing at 96 miles.

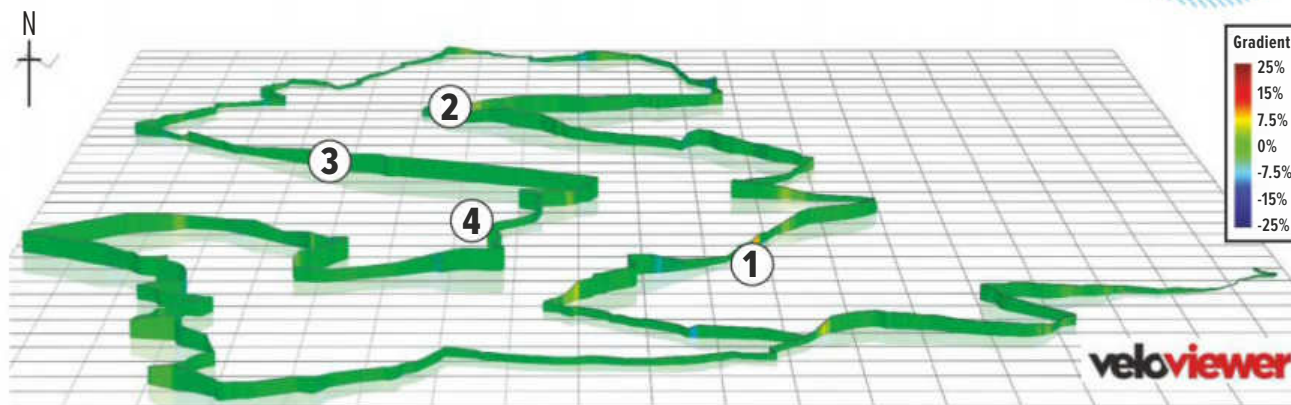
"Ninety-six miles. Really?" asks Zac incredulously. "Could they not find a short detour to take it up to 100?"

I couldn't agree more. A cricketer dismissed on 96 would kick his bat all the way to the pavilion. Hit four more runs, however, and it would be head held high and bat carried aloft on the way back to the clubhouse. Deep down, I know that the shortfall of four miles shouldn't make a difference. I'm a grown man and 96 miles is plenty in my book, but I still crave the satisfaction of ticking off a century. It's a threshold, a landmark, a badge of honour, if you like, and so as we cross the A14 for the final time back to Huntingdon Race Course I scour the countryside for an extra steeple, one more church to which I can ride and return to clock up a round 100 miles. For the first time today, it seems as though the horizon is clear... the good Lord works in mysterious ways.

THE ROUTE & KEY CLIMBS

The Wiggle Steeple Chase Sportive takes place on September 17, 2016. Entry costs £35, at www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk. The sportive gets its name from the

amount of historic church steeples you'll pass along the way and the route will take you through three counties: Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire.



For a Veloviewer link go to <http://veloviewer.com/routes/5476923>

CLIMBS

1 Belton's Hill to Barham

This cheeky little ascent, directly after crossing the A14, will force every rider to stand on the pedals. Its gradient hits 15 per cent in places, and averages seven per cent along its 300m. Strava KOM: 35 seconds.

2 Luton Road, Polebrook

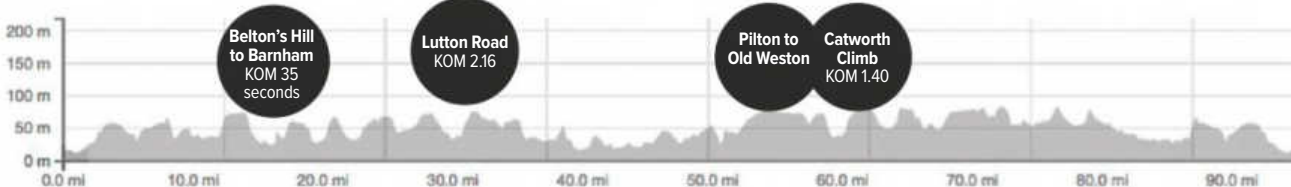
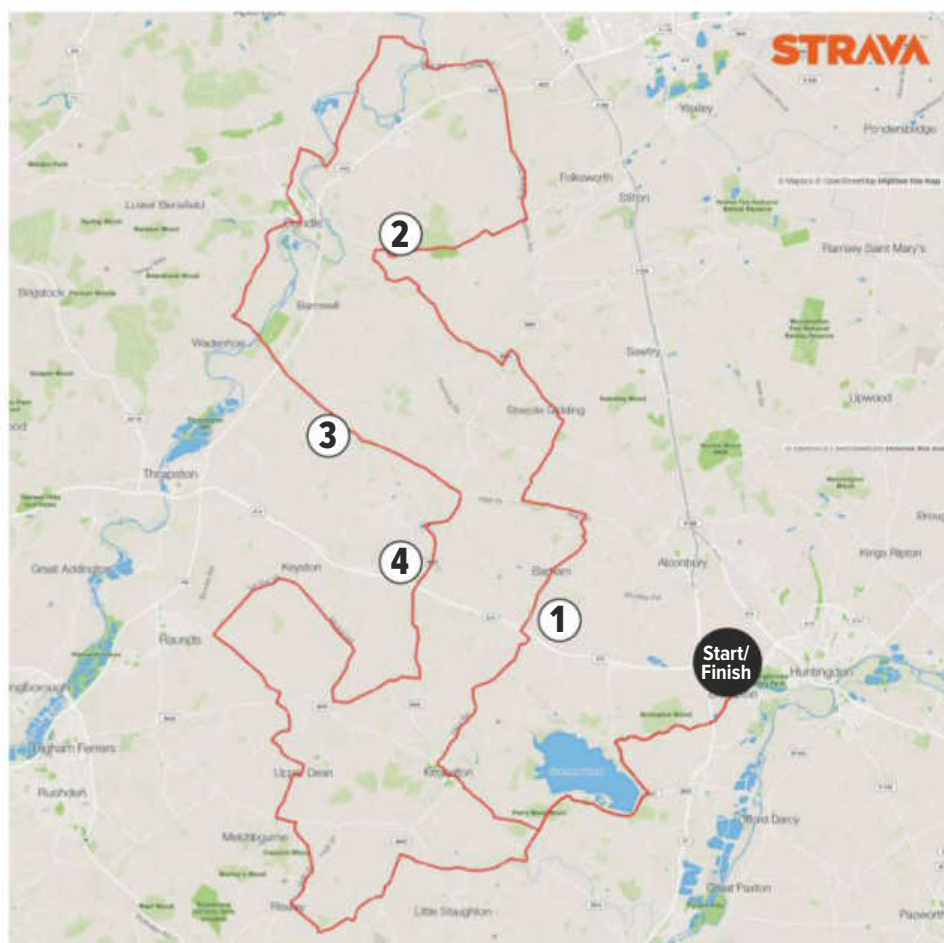
Typical of the climbs on this sportive, this innocuous one-mile ascent averages just three per cent. Be warned, however, that the steady accumulation of one uphill after another brings to mind a war of attrition. Strava KOM 2.16

3 Pilton to Old Weston

A Strava segment in waiting, this is a long straight, and with a tailwind and a group of riders prepared to work together, it's an opportunity to turbo boost your average speed along almost 10 miles.

4 Catworth Climb

Select the correct gears and you can stay in the saddle as you spin up this hill, but with more than 60 miles in your legs it's two-thirds of a mile that will sap your energy reserves. Strava KOM 1.40



➤ Route map and profile is available at www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk/events/wiggle-steeple-chase-sportive



Words: Simon Schofield, Photos: Chris Catchpole



AS EASY AS FTP

A new testing protocol promises gold-standard fitness data without an off-putting level of pain, explains *Simon Schofield*

“**U**nless you’re sick at the end, you’re not doing it right.” That advice is part of the macho mythology that surrounds fitness tests, often uttered to those contemplating the unique misery of an FTP test. These words accurately summarise the kind of all-out effort needed to master the 20-minute pain-fest, while also capturing the downside of the test — it’s really, really hard.

It’s only natural to avoid things that are really, really hard. Unless you’re an elite cyclist, you’re a pretty unusual individual if you positively relish the prospect of an FTP test. Consequently, most of us don’t do these tests as often as we should — or ever.

That’s a shame because the FTP test is one of the best things you can do if you want to improve. Its findings help set effective training zones and it’s a gateway to structured training, which the best way to improve performance on the bike. So what if there were a fitness test protocol that was just as valuable and data-rich as the FTP test but didn’t conjure up dread at the prospect and leave you in bits at the end? That’s got to be a good thing.

These positives-without-the-negatives are what draw me and two other cyclists to the light, airy atrium of a building in Evesham that is dominated by Wattbikes, fans, screens, monitors and, happily, an air-conditioning system. Ringmaster of

this scene is sports scientist Eddie Fletcher, who has coached several big name cyclists to world-beating success. We’re here to complete a brand new fitness test designed by Fletcher in conjunction with the UCI World Cycling Centre (WCC), cycling’s governing body.

The UCI’s plan is to use this test to spot promising new talent, to identify the kind of cyclists who have the right physiology to make it to the very top of the sport. At stake for those who do well in the test is the potential of a place on the UCI’s WCC programme.

The WCC already has feathers in its cap — notably, Daniel Teklehaimanot, who became the first African rider to hold the coveted climber’s jersey in the Tour de France last year. Both Chris Froome and Victoria Pendleton are also graduates of the WCC.

The programme is dedicated to finding riders from nations who may not have access to the kind of sophisticated coaching and testing facilities available in the traditional cycling countries; it has set up five satellite centres. The WCC needs to know that anybody attending any of its centres can be tested to universal and standardised methods — hence the new protocol. Conducted on a Wattbike, this test allows the decision-makers at the WCC to gauge, objectively, a rider’s performance and potential.

Fletcher has not designed the new test specifically to be easier than, say, a traditional 20-minute FTP test; he’s designed it to measure similar parameters to those



established by the FTP test but also others, including sprint ability. As he outlines the protocol as we sit astride the Wattbikes, I feel notably free from the feeling of utter dread that usually accompanies the prelude to an FTP test.

Before we kick off with the testing, we are to complete a 20-minute warm-up. Fletcher explains: "I can't emphasise enough how important this is. Your body simply can't perform to its best unless the muscles are fully warmed up, leg speed adapted and the mind prepared.

"I want you to keep to the cadences I'll give you and I'll be adjusting the resistance on the Wattbikes to get your heart rates to where I want them to be."

As we start to spin at 90rpm in a light gear, Fletcher explains the second, and equally important, aspect of the warm-up sequence. "This is going to let me get a

really good look at your pedalling technique. If you've not thought about the way you pedal, you really should," he says, as our heart rates begin to climb.

"Improving pedalling technique is probably the best way of making big gains. That, and losing a few kilos."

This is the area in which the Wattbike really comes into its own. A series of sensors chart exactly how much force is being applied to the pedal at every point

"The key is to pull the heel back at the bottom of each stroke"



Pedal stroke data is displayed as a visual

in its rotation. It produces a whole series of numbers, but happily these are converted into a simple graphic, roughly the shape of a peanut.

Fletcher punches up a graphic representing a world-class elite rider; it's the shape of a peanut with a fat middle. My peanut has a thin middle. Fletcher frowns at mine. "The lines in the middle getting closer to each other represents a loss of power in the pedal stroke – a dead spot, basically, where there is next to no power going through the pedals.

"That means you're 'stomping' rather than rotating smoothly. It means you're less powerful than you can be but it also means that the quads and glutes you're using to make this shape will tire quicker. Your heart rate will rise and the oxygen demand will become greater, making you more tired."

The key to sorting this out, says Fletcher, is to pull the heel back at bottom dead centre of each stroke. It's the oft-repeated 'scraping mud from the shoe' action. Opinion is split on this technique but Fletcher is completely sold on its efficacy. "It's a gentle pull rather than an extreme kick back. It brings the hamstrings into the power stroke, taking the strain off the quads and glutes.

"If you do this, for the same power output the heart rate goes down and you will go faster," he tells us.

Pedal action tips

We try it and instantly the peanut changes shape, becoming more like an elite rider's. And it would be very difficult to mount a successful case that elite riders don't know how to pedal properly.

Fletcher says that riders can drill this new action into their pedal stroke within about six weeks. After that it becomes automatic. Gains can be huge — up to 40 watts of additional power. "In 10 years of testing, I don't think I've ever seen people not gain power by altering their pedal technique in this way," says Fletcher.

A couple of short, hard efforts at 150rpm see us through the 20-minute warm-up sequence. The rivulets of sweat pouring on to the Wattbike confirms that I, for one, am thoroughly warmed up. Now for the main event.

Unlike the traditional FTP test, which is 20 minutes of hell, this protocol is divided up into shorter sections, none of them hellish. We kick off with two all-out six-second sprints, looking for maximum power and leg speed. They are divided up by 3:54 of rest. The sprints are so short you don't actually have time to get out of breath. Heart rate continues to rise after it's ended, but it's not a tough interval.



HOW DO WE COMPARE? AMATEUR V ELITE

Our best effort: it goes without saying that the gap between club cyclists and pro riders is a big one — but how big? We asked Eddie Fletcher to come up with some comparable figures for elite riders so we could quantify the size of the gap. For each of the intervals, from short sprint, through long sprint to four-minute endurance, we have taken the best figure of the three of us ordinary cyclists and compared it to the figures of the top pros.

Test	Our best effort	Elite rider
Six-second sprint – peak power	15.67w/kg (Steve Tarling)	Elite rider: over 20w/kg
Six-second sprint – average power	13.71w/kg (Steve Tarling)	Elite rider: over 16w/kg
30-second sprint – peak power	14.91w/kg (Richard Young)	Elite rider: over 20w/kg
30-second sprint – average power	8.79w/kg (Richard Young)	Elite rider: over 13w/kg
Endurance/FTP	3.0-3.25w/kg (Steve Tarling)	Elite rider: over 5w/kg

RIDER PROFILES AND RESULTS

Experienced clubman

Name Steve Tarling **Age** 43 **Weight** 66.5kg

Cycling history I started cycling as a teenager and loved it and used to race a bit. Then in my early 20s I gave it up. I started smoking and drinking and all those things, and I'd got into pretty bad shape. I took up cycling again about 10 years ago. What I love are long, hard days out, so I will do club runs of 80 or 100 miles. I like to average around 18mph for those kinds of rides. I commute twice a week, around 15 miles each way, and I treat those as training rides.

Cycling ambition I'm a gold standard rider in sportives and I'd like to stay at that level. I'd like to be fit enough to enjoy club runs over decent distances without getting dropped by anybody. I've no intention of racing again, though.

Attitude to training I don't do structured training. I do absolutely everything on feel. I don't even wear a heart-rate monitor and I would never consider buying a power meter. I've got a Garmin, but to be honest the only things I look at is speed, distance and time. I'm not into gadgets at all.

Sports science knowledge Pretty much zero. I have no idea about training zones. I've never done an FTP test or a test of any kind.

Expectations of today None really. I came into it open-minded, and I'm looking forward to it.

What the test was like Tougher than I thought it would be. On the longest interval I actually thought I was going to have to bail part way through. Maybe I didn't pace it right and went out too hard. It was definitely a sweaty session, but then I'm not used to training indoors at all.

Expert verdict The good news for Steve is that Fletcher thinks he knows where can find up to 40W of additional power almost immediately — a huge improvement. Fletcher (and the Wattbike's sensors) have identified "a huge discrepancy" in leg balance. Over the longest, four-minute, interval, Steve was unbalanced in his pedalling, with 47 per cent of the power coming from his left leg and 53 per cent from his right. Steve needs to learn to rebalance his pedalling technique to improve. Steve also has consistent left and right dead spots, caused by under-use of the hamstrings. "Scraping through at the bottom of the pedal stroke will give more power for less effort," says Fletcher.



Keen newbie

Name: Richard Young **Age:** 30 **Weight** 91kg

Cycling experience I've only been cycling for about two years, so almost everything is new to me. I've done a '10' and I started a '25' but I got a puncture about seven miles in.

Cycling ambition This season, I'm really going to concentrate on time trialling. The '10' that I finished was done in about 27 minutes, but I'd really like to target 24 minutes.

Attitude to training I'm the opposite of Steve — I'm a complete geek! I love all the gadgets and I like to follow a plan. I've been using Trainer Road's 40K TT plan all winter on my Tacx Vortex turbo. I like the idea of structured training and a plan that I can follow and I'd love to be able to get a power meter for my riding outside.

Sports science knowledge I've got a basic understanding of the principles. I'm really keen to learn as much about the scientific side of training as I can because I know that if I understand and implement a training plan that it will make me faster.

Expectations of today I've never ridden a Wattbike and I was really interested to see what the pedalling technique stuff would tell me.

What the test was like It was hard. Not as hard as a 20-minute FTP test because the work intervals were shorter.

Expert verdict Given that Richard has an interest in, and some knowledge of, sport science already, he will probably get more immediate value out of his test results than Steve. His numbers will show him training zones but he probably needs to use a qualified coach to get the best out of these by embarking on a programme of structured training.

More immediately, Fletcher has also identified gains that could be made — of up to 20w — by improving his pedalling technique. Richard was not as unbalanced as Steve (49 per cent left leg/51 per cent right leg) but his 'peanut' revealed that he is drastically under-using his right hamstring. This can be drilled out of his pedalling technique by concentrating on equally scraping through at the bottom of the stroke. "He's got a dead spot. It's quite pronounced. Just smoothing that out will improve his power output. He will produce the same power for less effort. He is working harder than he should be."





The tests begin under Fletcher's guidance

FTP VERSUS WCC

Traditional FTP test

Although there are several protocols for completing FTP tests, it's often thought that the gold standard is a 20-minute effort.

How to do it Riders should complete a thorough warm-up session, including some light spinning, a couple of three or four-minute hard efforts, and a couple of short sprints. The test itself is 20 minutes long and involves riders burying themselves for the full interval. It should be paced correctly, so it's always a bad idea to set out too hard. The mantra is to sustain the pace at your maximum effort without blowing up. It's best done on a turbo, although it can be done outside on a piece of road where you aren't getting held up by traffic lights or turns. The terrain should be flat or gently uphill.

What it's like Horrible, in a word. It can be hard to get the pacing right, and many people fail in their first few attempts. Twenty minutes is an awfully long time at full gas; especially on a turbo, it requires intense concentration. Conventional wisdom says you should be utterly spent as you complete the test.

What it says Best done with a power meter, you should take the average power held for 20 minutes and subtract five per cent of that figure. So if you held 300W, subtract 15W, to give you an FTP of 285W.

WCC test

The protocol is two six-second sprint efforts; one 30-second all-out sprint effort and one four-minute sustained effort concentrating on holding a pace that can be maintained to the end.

How to do it The test requires a thorough 20-minute warm-up, with high cadence (a minimum of 90rpm) a couple of harder efforts at 110-120rpm and a couple of short very high cadence (150rpm) efforts.

What it's like Tough, but not daunting. The hardest interval is the four-minute effort. But the test does not leave you broken and it's one that you could imagine performing frequently.

What it says Fletcher, the test designer, says it gives insight into sprint and endurance capabilities as well as ability to resist fatigue. The numbers require interpretation by a qualified coach to get maximum value. The WCC test can give an FTP from which you can derive training zones.

How to use the WCC protocol

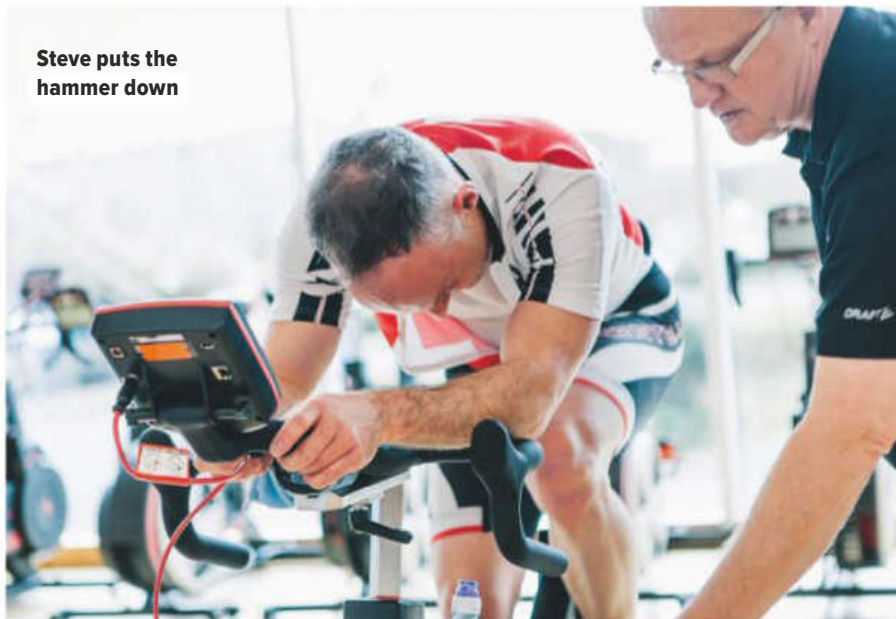
The test is best on a turbo trainer. Programme a thorough warm-up using your software of choice (all the providers now allow you to create workouts — or if you have an ANT+ smart trainer, you can use a Garmin head unit to control it).

Then programme the intervals as follows: Sprint for 6sec/recover easy spinning for 3:54/sprint for 6sec/recover easy spinning for 3:54/sprint for 30sec/recover easy spinning for 2:00/go at your hardest sustainable pace for 4:00. Cool down.

To derive your estimated FTP, take the average wattage over the four-minute interval and subtract 20 per cent. So if you held 300W over four minutes, subtract 60W to give an estimated FTP of 240W. You can use that figure to calculate training zones.

The test can be performed outside but it's best to find a quiet piece of road where you can do it without any distractions.

Steve puts the hammer down



Fletcher's training tips

Eddie Fletcher has spent years testing cyclists and he's coached a number of top athletes. Based on his experience, he has three general training tips, good for any cyclist.

Use a higher cadence and lighter gear

"I would recommend never dropping below 90rpm. If you need to move up the cassette to keep that cadence, that's what you should do. You do see some cyclists grinding away in a high gear and doing OK, but I have never coached or tested a single cyclist who who hasn't improved by working on their cadence to keep it higher."

Work on your pedalling technique

"There are big gains that can be made by using all the muscles in the legs and concentrating on a pedal stroke that emphasises a smoother rotation so that fatigue is reduced and more power is produced for less effort. The best way to do this is to pull back on the pedal at the bottom of the pedal stroke"

Take it easy

"Most cyclists just don't do enough lower-zone endurance work. They think it's 'easy'. I don't use easy and hard; I just think of it all as training. An athlete will come back to me and say, I've just done a session, it felt too easy. I will say: No, it wasn't. You were just training. I asked you to do Zone 2 and you've done it. It was for a reason."

"If you do a few of them, they can be surprisingly fatiguing," says Fletcher. "We include two in the protocol to give the rider the best chance of getting a good result."

My figures are nothing to write home about — a max power of around 1,100w. Steve, a lighter rider than me, clocks up around 1,050w, and Richard, a heavier rider, scores a very respectable 1,300w.

Next up is a 30-second all-out effort. This is a bit harder, and although short, does require some pacing. I manage to average 600w across the interval. Steve holds 550w and Richard a very impressive 800w. These figures are best interpreted by adjusting for weight and using the w/kg metric. Here, I score a very average 7.23w/kg, Steve is better at 8.3w/kg and Richard comes out on top at 8.8w/kg.

The last section of the test is the most gruelling. Fletcher asks us to go as hard as we can for four minutes. As a veteran of winter interval training on the turbo, I don't find it too daunting and I hang on to 320w (3.9w/kg) for the duration. Steve manages 260w (3.9w/kg) and Richard holds 303w (3.3w/kg). There is a trick to measuring your effort over a hard four-minute interval, and I suspect that Steve's lack of experience on a turbo has affected his result. And that's it — the test is done.

"Many coaches suggest testing at six-week intervals gives best results"

Measure and adjust

Fletcher has a lot of data to crunch, and as he's downloading the numbers, he asks me if I felt I had under-performed. His highly experienced eyes had clearly picked up some clues. Just three days earlier, I'd finished a training camp in Majorca, riding seven days on the bounce with a total mileage of over 400 and 9,000m of climbing. That had come after a poor spring for me, with a lack of long rides, although I had put plenty of effort into the turbo. Fletcher doesn't seem surprised. "You're fatigued. After a week like that, you need another week of almost complete recovery."

But despite being under-recovered, there's no doubt that this an easier test to complete than the conventional 20-minute FTP test — and so you'd be more likely to undertake it more often. Many coaches suggest that testing at six-week intervals gives the best results, allowing riders to monitor progress and adjust training zones accordingly.

If I am honest, I don't test my own FTP or adjust training zones with anything like that frequency. I find the conventional 20-minute FTP test a big ask — I'm always finding excuses not to do it. I can honestly say that this protocol would hold no such fears, and with the backing of such a highly experienced sports scientist who has worked with some of the best athletes in the world, I'm confident that the data it produces is equally valuable.

That said, tests are only ever as good as the use you make of the data they produce. Unless the data is correctly interpreted and used to construct a proper training plan, they are just a set of numbers — interesting perhaps, but useless.



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John Walsh previews the route of an Italian Gran Fondo, taking in the rolling hills of Tuscany along with some delicious regional sustenance

Looking at the route profile confirmed what I had seen from the car window driving to the start — it was going to be a day of multiple ups and downs. The scenery around Radda in Chianti is typically Tuscan: rounded hills dotted with olive groves and lines of cypress trees.

Stunning to the eye but hard on the legs.

Today's ride is the route of the Grand Fondo Gallo Nero. It is a very hilly route with 3,384 metres of height gain in a little under 150 kilometres of riding and I am joined by some local expats. Sean is British, Kevin is American and Brett hails from Canada. Sean and Kevin have both ridden the Gran Fondo before. *Cycling Active* editor Hannah is also along for the ride, the combination of long miles, hills and the promise of red wine proving irresistible.

Radda in Chianti is one of five main towns in the Chianti region. It is a pretty hilltop town with expansive views and many medieval features. It can be busy during the day at the height of the tourist season but is peaceful in the evenings once most of the day-trippers have departed.

It is a popular destination for cyclists. Numerous tours and cycling holidays come through here and it is also close to the route of L'Eroica, the vintage bike race that takes place every October and is now a permanently marked route, taking in the infamous *strade bianche*, the hallowed white roads of Tuscany. It also formed the start of the stage nine time trial in the Giro d'Italia this year.

As we roll out I admire Kevin's bike, in particular the writing on the chainstay "Mangia. Beve. Bici." which translates as "Eat. Drink. Ride." Not bad advice. The drink part is particularly pertinent to today's ride as our route takes us through numerous vineyards. I'm looking forward

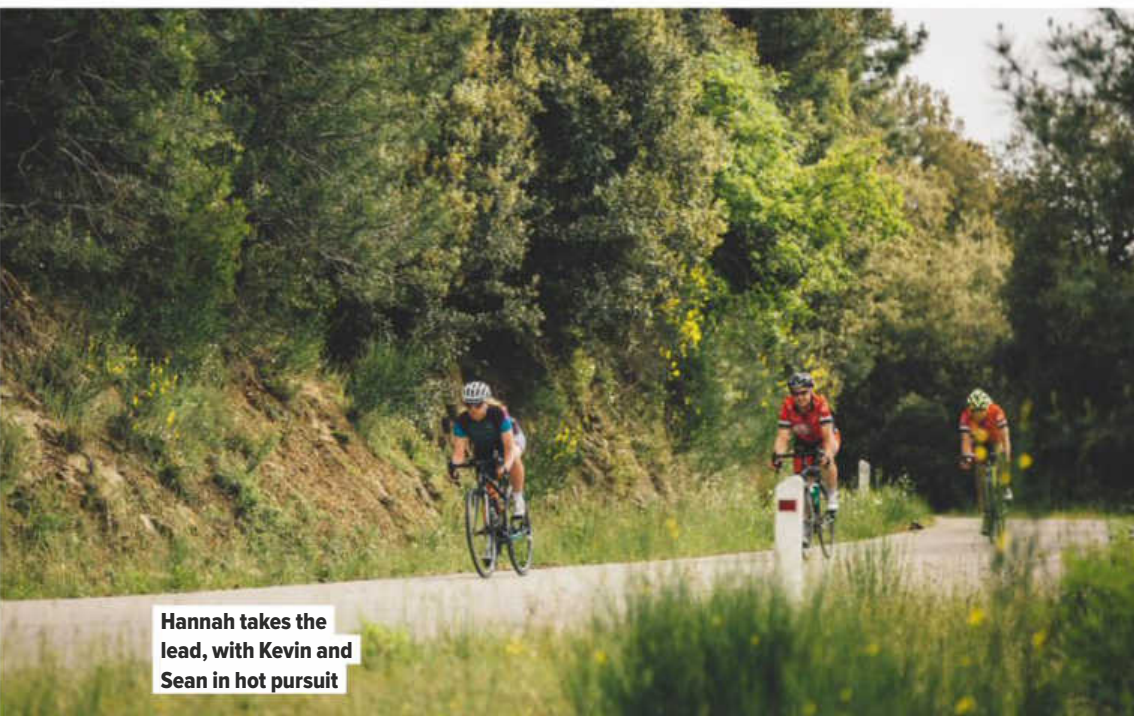
to the glass of Chianti that I'm hoping to sample and some hearty Tuscan food, but we have to earn it first.

As we hit the first climb of the day, within a few minutes of starting, it becomes apparent that living in the Tuscan hills has developed Sean and Kevin's talent for going uphill. "You have to enjoy climbing if you live here," explains Sean. "It's virtually impossible to do a flat ride unless you cut through the hills and head for the coast." Kevin, it turns out, takes "enjoying climbing" to a whole new level. He has completed a series of 'Everests', and has the honour of being the first to successfully Everest Porlock Toll Road in Exmoor and both sides of Bealach na Bà in the Scottish Highlands. If you are not familiar with this latest cycling craze it is where you climb the same hill repeatedly within a 24-hour period until you have climbed the total height of Mount Everest.

If I'm honest I can't entirely understand the desire to ride the same hill repeatedly. I would rather follow a route and enjoy the journey. It is not that I am against climbing but I'd rather ride through changing landscapes to gain my vertical metres. Kevin explains that part of the fascination is seeing how your body and mind changes over time. "The road remains the same but how you feel and how you relate to it changes constantly," he says.

To Everest Bealach na Bà is barely short of insanity. I have done it once and that was hard enough. Kevin completed an Everest on one side, then went back to do the other. "We had a headwind the first time we did it and we thought approaching from the other side, with the sea at our back, would give us a tailwind. We picked the wrong day and ended up with a headwind on the other side as well. The locals told us that there are only one or two days a year when the wind blows from that side, so we were really unlucky!"





Hannah takes the lead, with Kevin and Sean in hot pursuit

A tale of two cockerels

The first part of our ride is far more wooded than I'd expected from Tuscany — deciduous trees crowd overhead providing some useful shade. It's hot but not unpleasantly so and the gradients allow us to slot into a steady rhythm. I'm at the top of my cassette but spinning nicely; it's steep enough to require work but it's not biting, at least not yet.

We reach a stretch of road that seems quintessentially Italian, it has it all, the lines of Cipressa, a squat stone building in warm buttery tones and lines of vines. At the end of each line an artist has painted imagery onto a large stone, there is a woman carrying a basket of grapes, a donkey and the ubiquitous black cockerel, the Gallo Nero that this event is named after and the symbol for the Chianti region. Sean encourages Kevin to tell us his story of how the black cockerel gained significance in the area.

In the Middle Ages there was a huge amount of rivalry between Sienna and Florence. The Chianti region lies between the two and our route dips into both. To bring an end to the battles with as little bloodshed as possible, the two cities decided to settle the disagreement of the boundary in a competition between two knights. It was

“The black cockerel is still the emblem of Chianti”

agreed that the knights were to set out on horseback from their respective cities at 'cock-crow' and where they met is where the frontier between the two republics would be.

The people of Sienna raised a large white rooster that they fed all the best food till it grew fat. The Florentines chose a black rooster and never fed him. On the day of the race, as he was starving, the black rooster started to crow before dawn. The Florentine knight set out earlier than the Siennese knight and they met at Fonterutoli (where Kevin now lives) just 12km from Sienna, leaving almost all of the Chianti region under the rule of the Florentine republic. The black cockerel has remained the emblem of Chianti since and now appears on bottles of Chianti Classico red wine.

Having told us the story of the cockerel Kevin took us on a slight detour of the route to ride through the old village of Fonterutoli. Quaint and picturesque, there is little there besides the church and the *enoteca* — wine shop — but our flying visit through the narrow alleyways between old buildings was full of charm.

Gran Fondo etiquette

Having conquered the first loop of the figure of eight, we passed back through Radda in Chianti and took

THE RIDERS

Kevin Connors

Kevin was born in New York and lives in nearby Fonterutoli. He rides for Team dZi, a Colorado-based charity that funds community-based projects in Nepal.



Brett Naisby

Brett is Canadian and has been living in Chianti since 1994. He runs Customwalks, an active travel company that organises walking and cycling tours throughout Europe.



Sean Caulfield

Originally from Essex, Sean now lives in Radda-in-Chianti and is the proprietor of To-Tuscany, a holiday and villa rental company. He is a regular rider of Gran Fondo events and trains in the Tuscan Hills.



Hannah Reynolds Cycling Active editor

Hannah never misses the chance to ride somewhere new or take on a cycling challenge so this combination of hills and red wine was too much to resist.



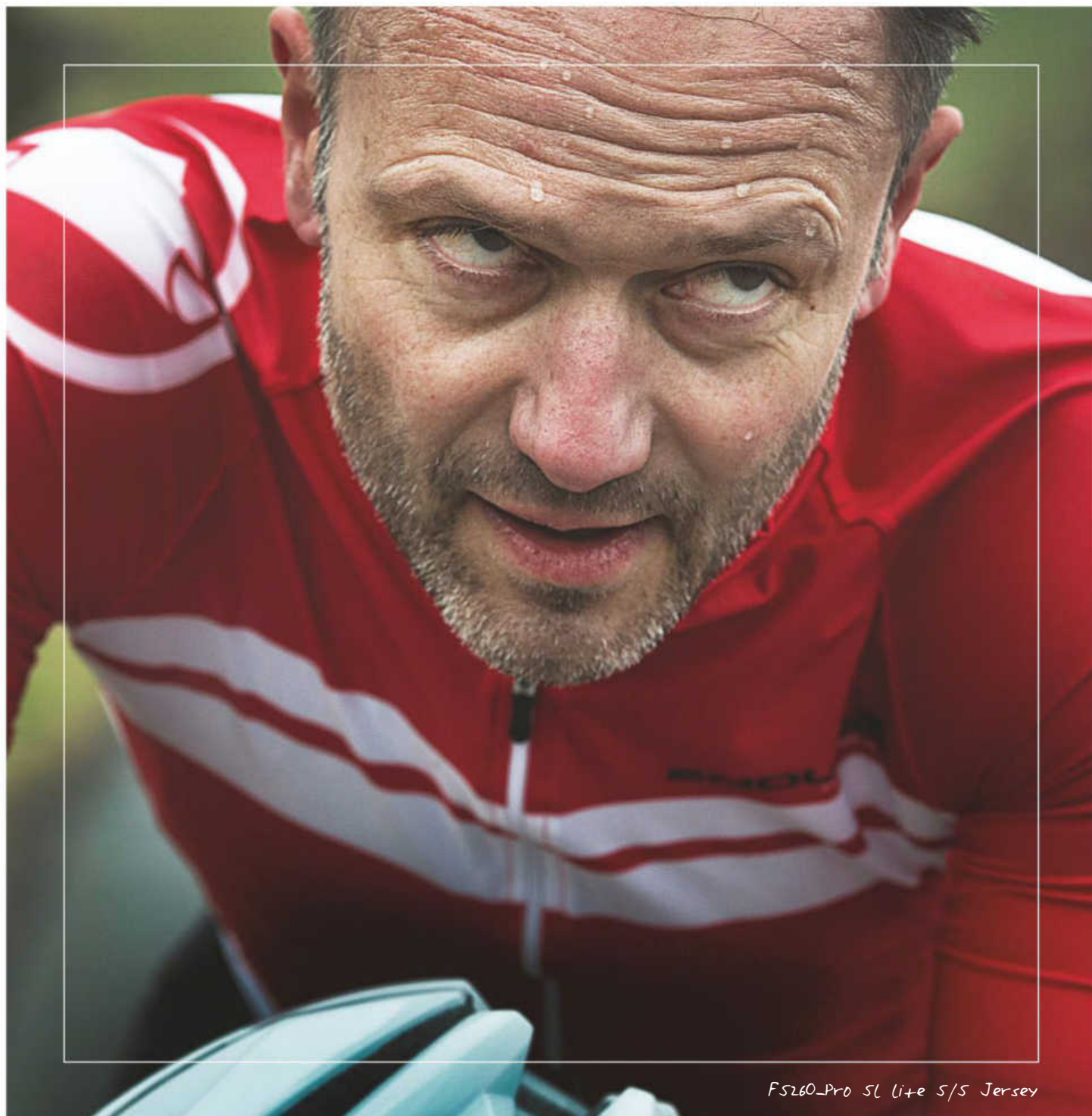
John Walsh International cycle guide and guidebook

author John has worked all over the world from Bolivia, Colombia and Costa Rica to the Alps of France. A native Cumbrian he still swears the best riding can be found close to home.



Eat, drink, ride: a motto for life





FS260-Pro SL Lite S/S Jersey

Whilst covert testing in 2013 to evaluate Endura's kit against the existing team issue, Movistar Team grandee Pablo Lastras had the only jersey in the group that wasn't soaked in sweat at the end of a hot weather training session. This blew his cover with the other riders.

Endura became the nominated clothing supplier of Movistar Team the following year.

That same item is now available in form of our FS260-Pro SL Lite Jersey.

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advantage of this opportunity for a quick lunch. The perfectly cooked pasta al funghi and short, sharp espresso I hoped was enough to get me through the second loop of the ride, which we were warned started with a really tough, steep climb.

While eating we chatted about the difference between a British sportive and an Italian Gran Fondo. At the front of the field a Gran Fondo is very much a race with well-supported teams and sponsored riders fighting fiercely for the win. There are cash prizes and huge amounts of prestige for successful riders. There are also rumours of doping programmes and cheating.

The second part of the field is more akin to the bulk of UK sportive riders, but you still need to be confident riding in a pack and be prepared for the hard, fast starts. When I mentioned the leisure riders who do UK sportives, and how I occasionally see riders in football shorts and tennis shoes, the Italian riders were genuinely shocked; this would not happen in a Gran Fondo.

Cumbrian-style climbs

With the pasta and coffee tucked away and fresh water in our bottles, it was time to head back through Radda and out onto our second loop. The first loop had a lot of climbing but at gradients that felt relatively easy. A very short descent takes you out of Radda and then almost immediately the road begins to climb. It's steep, far closer to what I am used to in the Cumbrian hills than anything we'd ridden so far in Tuscany. And it goes on, and on.

We soon get split up across the hillside, but with the taste of pasta and espresso threatening to rise back up my throat all I can do is keep my nose to

the front wheel. This is not a climb to tackle at any pace but your own. Two big sweeping hairpin bends provide a brief respite and I pedal my way around the flattest outer edge but it barely eases the pressure. We regroup at the top where there is a left-hand turn and brief descent before it kicks up some more all the way to the true summit. The shorter route avoids this — something at times I

thought I should have done, my other advice is don't eat lunch first!

With the climbing over we are rewarded with a long, lightly wooded shady descent. It's the longest of the day and enough to lull me into thinking the worst is over, but I am wrong. We all ease off the pressure and the pace becomes more

leisurely. There are a few places that my hosts want to show me on the final half-segment of our loop.

“Pasta and coffee tucked away, we head back through Radda again”

Chewing the fat

First of our tourist stops is Greve-in-Chianti and the finish line of the Giro d'Italia time trial. We stop in the wide cobbled square and take pictures of each other with pink bikes and bunting in the background. Our route then starts to trace the time trial route backwards towards Radda in Chianti. As we leave the town on a wide road I note that the town has reined the budget in on its hosting duties by only laying fresh tarmac on the half of the road that the racers would have used — our half is still lumpy and furrowed!

The time trial had a downhill finish — in reverse this means we have a long climb back up towards Radda, it undulates slightly and there are sections of false flat but the trend is ever upward. The road in this second half is busier, but also slightly wider and the scenery is less wooded. Brett points out to me the villa where Kenneth Branagh filmed *Much Ado About Nothing*. As the road curves above we look down on its classical lines and formal tree plantings — this is one of the places that formed our perception of Tuscan looks.

Sean and Kevin pull ahead on the climb, leaving myself, Brett and Hannah to bring up the rear and admire the scenery. As we pull into the village of Panzano, Kevin directs us off the route up a side street. It's late in the day and I'm not altogether keen on this extra detour but he assures me it is something I will want to see. I suspect, and hope, for ice cream but instead I see Sean beckoning from inside a butcher's shop.

I am greeted by a larger-than-life butcher who shakes my hand, grabs Hannah for an embrace and enthusiastic smack of the lips on each cheek. Sean hands me a glass of Chianti and indicates the table of dried meats to try. It is the strangest butcher's shop I have ever been into. The shop's stereo is pumping out rock music

THE BIKE

While a Pinarello is always an eye-catching bike, what makes this one stand out is the added graphics — “Mangia. Beve. Bici” — and the Italian flag and colours show that it is truly at home in Tuscany.





1
2

Sweeping descents
open onto glorious
Chianti country



Grapevines and
Cypress trees are
typically Tuscan

and there is a party atmosphere. While we are eating our dried meats — the best I have ever tasted, being both moist and deeply savoury — a tourist couple come in to grab their pictures with the mad butcher.

Dario Cecchini is passionate about food, an excellent butcher and welcoming host. Next door to his shop is a restaurant that serves pretty much meat and meat alone. There is a drawing of a cow showing where each cut comes from and the names of dishes are blunt and to the point. Hannah giggles and points to the one where the

meat is cooked with “Rosemary up the arse”. Brett comments that this sounds like the title of a Nine Inch Nails track. The meat we try is phenomenal; rich, dense fatty lumps of sausage are celebrated and drooled over. Admittedly I am a dedicated carnivore but even vegetarians can be won over by the passion for meat in its tastiest and purest form. Sean confirms this with a tale about taking a client for dinner who abandoned her vegetarian principles and announced it her best meal ever! I’d happily stay to drink wine and eat until I had to be rolled back onto my bike but unfortunately the rest of the group are suggesting it’s time to head for home. Panzano is luckily the top of the hill, giving me a little bit of descent to continue to savour the tastes before I have to start riding properly again.

KNOW THIS

Getting there:

Radda in Chianti is a two-hour drive from Pisa airport, which is well served with flights from the UK, including BA and EasyJet. Florence airport is just over an hour by car, there are direct flights from London City Airport and London Gatwick with Cityjet, BA and Vueling. The final part of the journey into Radda in Chianti is winding and hilly so allow plenty of time to drive.

Accommodation:

We stayed in Il Boschetto, a three-bedroom detached villa, sleeping six, with private pool, set among the vineyards just outside

Radda. Bookings are now open for 2017 and the villa costs from £995 to £1,588 per week, depending on season. To-Tuscany has a selection of handpicked villas in the area (0121 286 7782; www.to-tuscany.com).

Bike shops:

It is possible to hire good road bikes near to Radda in Chianti. Tuscany Bicycle in nearby Gaiole in Chianti offer a range from Bianchi (tuscanybicycle.com). In Radda-in-Chianti there is a small shop offering some basic spares and a wide range of cycling souvenirs and kit.

A feast for the senses

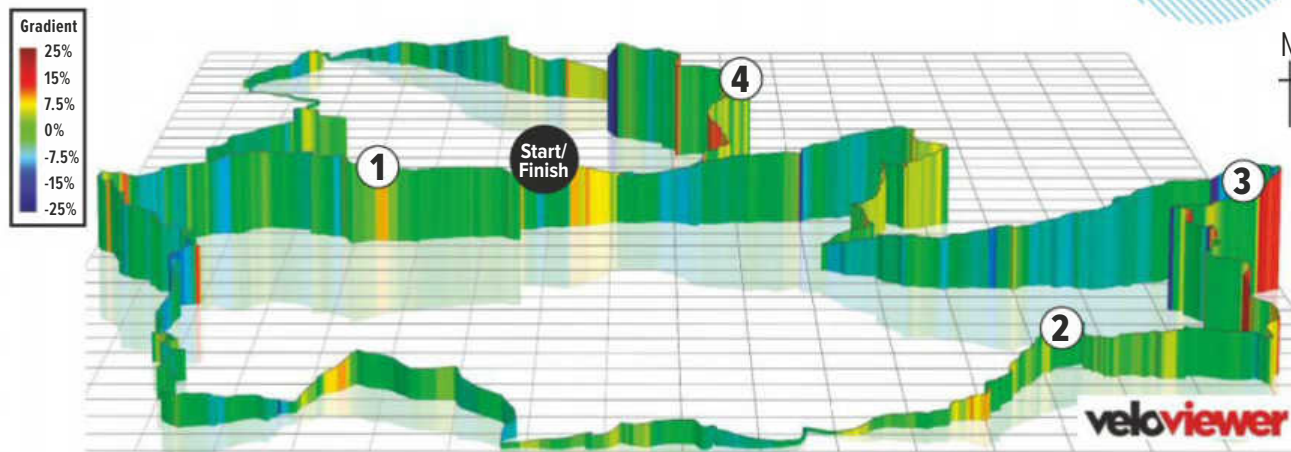
With only a few kilometres to go, the road continues its upwardly undulating ascent toward Radda. We lose Kevin as he peels off back towards home and the remaining four of us take a few steady turns at the front but the long miles and sip or three of red wine has blunted any desire to go faster. We still have the final sting in the tail to contend with, the very last little climb that takes us up into the town itself. For those racing the Gran Fondo this becomes a challenging sprint finish all the way into the old town. I’m happy to roll in gently at the back after a satisfying day in the saddle with my stomach rumbling. The only thing now that could make the day even better is a big steak and a glass of Chianti Classico. The motto on Kevin’s bike is, “Eat. Drink. Ride.” Today we have done all three.

THE ROUTE & KEY CLIMBS

Taking place on September 18, the weather should be pleasantly warm and the grape harvest will be in full swing. It is a challenging event thanks to the amount of

climbing so would make a great end-of-season holiday when you're at your fittest.

Enter here: www.granfondodelgallone.it



For a Veloviewer link go to <http://veloviewer.com/routes/5476002>

CLIMBS

1 Radda to Innes to SR222

The total length of this segment is 5.3 miles and while the average gradient is only one per cent it doesn't reflect the real steepness of the early sections. Take it steady here, as it's a long day out with more climbing to come.

2 Bossi to San Felice

Just less than a mile but at a gradient that will hurt a little, be prepared to dig in here and only ease off when San Felice comes into view. Once at the village the gradient eases off and you can relax — for a while at least.

3 SP73A Climb

One of the steepest sections of the entire route; you really need to be focused to tackle this 10 per cent average grade. It ramps up steadily and consistently so select the correct gear at the bottom and keep pushing all the way to the top.

4 How Steep is your Love?

Possibly the toughest section of the entire ride, the section before is hard so even before you start this segment you will be in your lowest gear and swinging on the bars. The two wide hairpin bends offer a little respite if you keep to the outside edge.



Map data ©2015 Google



➤ Route map and profile is available at www.granfondodelgallone.it

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JUL 17 **Suffolk Spinner**
SUNDAY Suffolk














JUL 23 **Malvern Mad Hatter**
SATURDAY Worcestershire

SEP 18 **CW125** **NEW**
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FINISHING TIME
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VS

FINISHING TIME
BY SOUTH RIDERS



350

PIES CONSUMED

1,000

ENERGY GELS



600

CANS OF DRINK

Rapha.

15:38:30



11:56:04

SHORTEST RIDE TIME



SUPPORT VEHICLES



17:46:29

LONGEST RIDE TIME

FACTS BASED ON 2014 & 2015 EDITIONS
AMBITIOUS ABOUT AUTISM REGISTERED CHARITY No: 1063184



Ultimate £3K bikes

What can you get for £3,000? A quality carbon frame, high-end components and a racy wheelset should be a bare minimum

Words: Nick Busca Photos: Roo Fowler

What?

£3,000 bikes, that's what. If you are spending this sort of money you want to ensure you get the most out of the bike. A decent groupset, wheelset and above all frameset that'll keep you smiling from ear to ear not only when you ride it but every time you look at it too. I found five different bikes that I hope can do that.

Why?

There's no doubt that £3,000 is the upper limit to many people's budget. It's a lot to spend on a bike, so what should you expect at this price point? Should you go for a lightweight, endurance or aero machine? We've picked five bikes that fall not only into this price range but that also differ in style. The aim is to see which gives the most bang for your hard-earned buck.

How?

I pushed these bikes in the usual testing lanes of Kent and Surrey, on long and short blasts, even in the odd criterium. Unlike the disc brake bikes we've been testing of late, I steered well clear of any real mucky lanes and really bad roads and treated all these machines with the respect they deserved. Well, almost.



TESTED



Cannondale Synapse Carbon Disc £3,250

A racy endurance machine featuring Di2



Specialized Tarmac Expert £3,000

Endurance geometry tailored to long rides



Canyon Ultimate SLX 8.0 Di2 £3,199

A great all-round road bike that offers superb value for money



Argon 18 Gallium Pro £3,499.99

It comes with a heavy price tag but this lightweight is a climber's dream



Bianchi Oltre XR1 £3,000

If cutting drag is your bottom line then this aero offering from Bianchi is worth a look

Argon 18 Gallium Pro £3,500



A climber's delight that's also a treat on the flat

The Gallium Pro is the lightest road bike Argon 18 produces. The company claims a weight of 790g for the frame and advertises it as the perfect bike for climbing.

Frame

We really loved the Gallium's frame, even though its designers opted for more squared tubes than the curvy ones we are used to seeing. The HDS (Horizontal Dual System) used to develop the Gallium Pro's frame is a system that uses two different carbon-fibres for the bottom and the top of the frame: the lower one is responsible of the rigidity of the bike, while the top one is developed for a more comfortable ride. The ride was fantastically fast, but we haven't found it to be super comfortable: the Gallium Pro remains a pretty stiff and racy bike.

Specification

The Gallium Pro mounts a complete Shimano Ultegra groupset (a plus compared to the Tarmac and Oltre), while 3T supplies the handlebar and stem. The Fulcrum Racing Quattro wheelset that completes the Gallium Pro set-up is a good aluminum wheel, but it makes the bike heavier (the wheelset weight is 1,878 g) and impacts its climbing sensibilities. If you decide the Prologo Kappa saddle doesn't suit you, you'll need patience and time, as the Gallium Pro has the same complex seat clamp arrangement as the Cannondale.

Ride

Because of the basic wheelset, we found the uphill performances of the Gallium Pro fell a little bit below our expectations. Initially the bike felt comfortable,

Specification

Frameset: Nanotech Tubing HM7050, Ga31 carbon fork
Gears: Shimano Ultegra, 11 28t
Chainset: Shimano Ultegra 52/36t
Brakes: Shimano Ultegra
Wheels: Fulcrum Racing Quattro
Tyres: Vittoria Rubino Pro tyres
Bar: 3T Ergosum
Stem: 3T Arx Pro
Seatpost: Gallium Pro
Saddle: Prologo Kappa Evo
Size range: XXS XL
Weight: 7.56kg/16.66lb
i-ride.co.uk

especially sat crusing in the saddle (the ergonomic bar is super-comfortable too), but over time the Gallium Pro slowly grinds you down. Argon 18 describes its bike as "the ultimate climbing bike", and with a different wheelset it might be. At the same time, with a weight of 7.56 kg the Gallium Pro can be very fast on the flat as well.

Value

The Gallium Pro is a great bike that performs uphill and is fast on the flat. However, don't expect to find a super-comfy bike as it is not on rougher roads.

We were relieved to see full Ultegra, but as with all the other bikes in this category, a basic wheelset made the Gallium a bit heavy and blunted its performance.



Full Ultegra should be expected at this price



Fork assists in the Gallium's fine handling



3T finishing kit suits the bike well

Cannondale Synapse Carbon Disc Ultegra Di2 £3,250



Pound for pound this leaves the competition standing

As the only endurance bike here — the SuperSix Evo Hi-Mod is Cannondale's more race oriented bike — the Synapse's design features and geometry are a bit different from the other bikes on test. But how does it shape up in the performance stakes?

Frame

The Synapse's frame has a longer head tube and shorter reach than the other bikes tested, making for a more upright riding position. It also has a host of in-built compliance features, including flattened chainstays and seatstays and thin fork blades to soak up bumps, and a split seat tube for power transfer without weight. This makes for a comfortable ride over less than perfect surfaces and for longer outings, but somewhat at the expense of performance.

Specification

Cannondale kits out the Synapse with Ultegra Di2 shifting, coupled to its own HollowGram alloy chainset with a 50/34t single-piece chainring, which runs on a BB30a bottom bracket. It has Shimano's R785 top-spec hydraulic disc brakes with 140mm rotors. Extra compliance comes from a skinny 25.4mm carbon seatpost and 28mm tyres on Mavic's robust, but not light Aksium Disc wheelset. There's a well-padded Fabric Spoon Shallow saddle, while bars and stem are from Cannondale's own-brand C2 alloy range.

Ride

The Synapse's ability to soak up road imperfections makes it a comfortable long-distance ride, while the more upright riding position relieves strain on the neck and shoulders. I was comfortable for extended outings on UK back

Specification

Frameset Synapse Disc BallisTec carbon, Save Plus all-carbon fork
Gears Shimano Ultegra Di2, 11-32
Chainset Cannondale HollowGram Si 50/34
Brakes Shimano R785 hydraulic disc
Wheels Mavic Aksium Disc
Tyres Mavic Aksion 28mm
Bars Cannondale C2 Compact alloy
Stem Cannondale C2 alloy
Saddle Fabric Spoon Shallow Race, Ti rails
Seatpost Cannondale C2 25.4mm
Weight 8.02kg/17.68lb
Size range 48, 51, 54, 56, 58, 61cm
Size tested 54cm
www.cyclingsportgroup.co.uk

roads and the 34x32t lowest gear means that the fiercest gradients are unlikely to defeat you.

However, that comfort is bought at the expense of out-and-out speed. Although not a slow or heavy bike, there's not the racing edge of some of the other bikes on test. The compliance features, large wheel clearance and wide tyres do mean you can tackle unpaved surfaces with a degree of confidence.

Value

The Synapse sits right in the middle of the price range tested. It's the best specced bike here though, while the own-brand swapouts which Cannondale has made introduce quality, innovative components such as the HollowGram chainset.



HollowGram chainset is a great feature



Twin-spar down tube enhances compliance



Disc brakes offer robust retardation

Canyon Ultimate CF SLX 8.0 Di2 £3,199



Incredibly capable performer from the direct sales firm

The Ultimate has been at the top of Canyon's road tree for over a decade. Now optimised as the perfect combination of performance, weight and comfort, it still cuts it as an all-day race bike.

Frame

Canyon uses a proprietary carbon lay-up to create the Ultimate CF SLX frame. Weighing less than 800g for the frame it is competitively light while remaining stiff and relatively narrow and aero. The seatpost clamp has been moved down by the seatstays to increase comfort, with the seatstays themselves wrapping around the top tube to stiffen the junction. This Di2-specific version is incredibly clean-looking, with just the tiny entry ports for the electric cable and rear brake entering the frame, leaving the rest of the frame unblemished.

Specification

Canyon is renowned for kitting its frames out with exceptionally well thought-out components and this is certainly the case with the Ultimate. A full Ultegra 11-speed Di2 groupset takes care of the shifting and braking, with a semi-compact chainset and 11-28 cassette covering most riders' ambitions nicely.

The Mavic Ksyrium wheels are exceptionally light and responsive, perfectly complementing the frame. Their Exalith braking surface does add stopping power but also generates considerable noise. An in-house bar, stem and seatpost complete the package, the H17 handlebar's slightly deeper drop suiting riders with larger hands.

Ride

With the combination of light weight and great wheels the Ultimate is an effortless bike to ride. Ride along the flat and the

Specification

Frameset Canyon Ultimate CF SLX
Gears Shimano Ultegra 6800, 11 28 cassette
Chainset Shimano Ultegra 52 36
Brakes Shimano Ultegra
Wheels Mavic Ksyrium Pro Exalith
Tyres Mavic Yksion Pro 700x25c
Bars Canyon H17 Ergo AL
Stem Canyon V13
Saddle Fizik Antares R5
Seatpost Canyon S13 VCLS CF
Weight 6.74kg / 14.83lb
Sizes XXS XXL
Size tested Large
www.canyon.com

Ultimate encourages you to push harder, resulting in faster average speeds. It's climbing where it begins to shine. Even steep, nasty gradients become (slightly) easier with no part of the bike holding you back. The head tube is taller than a typical race frame and does make the steering a little twitchy, especially when sprinting as your weight is pushed further back. This does, alongside the cleverly designed rear end, give the Ultimate a comfort level far above what you might expect — full day rides end up as enjoyable affairs.

Value

As one of the market leaders in direct sales, Canyon offers very good value in comparison with other brands. The combination of a quality frame, top-rate components and high-end wheels makes the Ultimate SLX a very attractive package.



Elegant frame comes in under 800g



Clever adjustment at the rear end



Full Shimano Ultegra groupset throughout

Specialized Tarmac Expert £3,000



A road bike with plenty of racing pedigree

Although the Expert is Specialized's third-tier Tarmac, below the Pro and of course the chart-topping S-Works, it still is — with some trickled down technology — a great frameset that shouldn't be ignored.

Frame

Although the styling isn't to everyone's taste, not that you have a choice in purchasing another colour, I like it. FACT 10r carbon is used on this model, which differs from the higher models only to allow a little more comfort out on

"This bike doesn't flounder under load, with an exciting and positive ride up or downhill"

the road — mainly allowing for a little more flex. This bike certainly doesn't flounder under load though and is an exciting and positive ride up or downhill. Spesh will use its 'rider-first engineered' concept, which means no matter what size bike you ride, they all should feel the same. No more hard 49cm frames or wobbly 64cm!

Specification

As with all the bikes in this test — apart from the added electric on the Canyon and Cannondale — the Specialized carries Shimano Ultegra groupset (minus the chainset, we assume for compatibility reasons with the BB30). Specialized bar, stem and seatpost work very well and again like the rest of the wheelsets on the bikes in this test, left the frame wanting for something a little stiffer.

Specification

Frameset Specialized FACT10r carbon with tapered FACT carbon fork
Gears Shimano Ultegra, 11 28t
Chainset FSA SL K 52/36t
Brakes Shimano Ultegra
Wheels Fulcrum S4
Tyres Specialized Turbo Pro 23c
Bar Specialized Expert shallow drop
Stem Specialized Pro SL alloy
Saddle Specialized Toupe Expert Gel
Seatpost S Works FACT Carbon
Size range 49–64cm
Weight 7.72kg / 17.01lb
www.specialized.com

Ride

The ride from the Specialized is stiff and I'd happily use this in a road race or criterium. It isn't a boneshaker though, and won't leave you battered and bruised after a four to five-hour epic. The ride is very predictable and does inspire confidence, especially when pushing on the descents.

Value

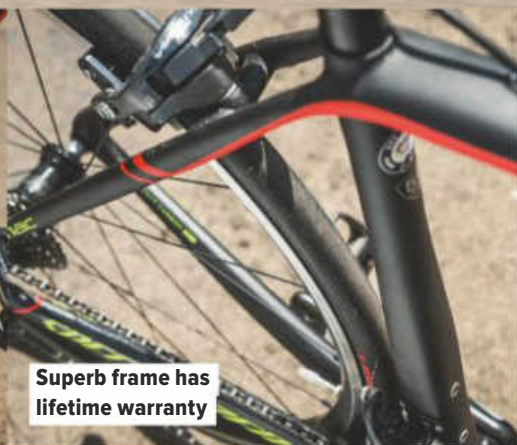
As with all the bikes here, you get a great frameset at this price. Specialized tops that off with a lifetime warranty, a great groupset and finishing components from its in-house brand. The frameset is let down by the wheelset, sadly. They do the job but I wouldn't want to take these hoops to my big event of the year.



Fork taper is matched to frame size



FSA chainset suits the BB30



Superb frame has lifetime warranty

Bianchi Oltre XR1 £3,000



With its aero detailing, this bike is built for speed

The Lotto-Jumbo pro team uses the Oltre XR2 (and now also the XR4), the bigger brothers of the model tested here. Retaining some of the features enjoyed by the pros, the XR1 is a superb bike that is fast but also super-stable.

Frame

The frame features many aero details (see the forks, the headset and the seatpost exit), but it also targets light weight and comfort (thinner seatstays). Bianchi claims a difference of 200g between the XR2 and the heavier XR1 frame (695g v 895g). Apart from that, the two bikes look exactly the same, as they're made with the same mould. The only difference is the grade of carbon-fibre used.

Specification

Like the Tarmac, the Oltre's Shimano Ultegra groupset isn't quite complete, with FSA Gossamer Pro brakes fitted. They performed very well, but not having a full Ultegra took some points from this great bike. Neither did the wheelset do the bike any favours. The Fulcrum Racing 7 LGs (£170 SRP) are a basic set. If you want to get the best from the Bianchi you'd want to upgrade.

Ride

The Oltre feels fast straight out of the box. And not only is it fast, its

"Its responsiveness in corners and downhill give the confidence to push harder"

Specification

Frame Oltre XR.1 carbon, Bianchi full carbon fork
Gears Shimano Ultegra 11 28
Chainset Shimano Ultegra 52/36
Brakes FSA Gossamer Pro
Wheels Fulcrum Racing 7 LG
Tyres Vittoria Zaffiro Pro Slick
Bar Reparto Corse Compact, Alloy 2014
Stem Reparto Corse
Saddle Selle San Marco Concor
Seatpost Reparto Corse
Size range 47-61cm
Weight 7.76kg/17.10lb
www.cycleurope.com

great responsiveness when cornering and going downhill give that extra confidence to push harder. The low weight (7.76kg) means it climbs well too, but it could do so significantly better with a change of wheels. The traditional round handlebar I personally didn't like as much as the ergonomic ones mounted on the Gallium Pro and the Tarmac.

Value

The Oltre and the Tarmac have the same price (£3,000) and perform very similarly, the Bianchi being the faster and the Tarmac the more responsive and comfortable. The bulk of this bike's considerable price is down to the frame, and as in the other cases fitting better wheels would complete the masterpiece.



Quirky looking
BB junction

Frame cutout
keeps it aero

FSA brakes are good,
but they're not Ultegra

Cycling
**BEST
ON TEST**



Verdict
‘Upstart’ with the X factor

ONE UP, ONE DOWN

Ultimate SLX 9.0 Di2 £4,699

It's a big jump up but if you want electronic shifting, the SLX9.0 Di2 gives you Dura-Ace electronic shifting and brakes plus upgraded Mavic R-Sys SLR wheels.



Ultimate SLX 8.0 £2,699

You can save £500 if you swap electronic shifting for mechanical Ultegra. The rest of the bike's finishing kit is identical to the Ultegra Di2 version.



While £3,000 pretty much guarantees quality, making the right choice to suit your exact needs does require careful consideration and there is a very clear line between endurance, lightweight and aero machines.

Reasons behind your choice will likely be based on the type of events you ride or race, the terrain around you or perhaps simply the machine that has the kind of handling you prefer.

With these criteria in mind, the Specialized Tarmac offers the most traditional racing set-up, the Bianchi is built with an emphasis on aerodynamics and the Cannondale is unashamedly aimed at endurance rides where comfort is as important as speed and efficient power transfer. Each excel in these areas so choosing a winner was never going to be easy.

The main premise of this test was to find the bike that delivered the best mix of value and all-round performance.

Fore pure climbing prowess the Argon is worth a look, but it is let down by wheels that really don't do its £3,500 price tag justice. Bianchi claims the aero stakes in our test and it felt fast on the flat but was let down by a few cost savings in key areas with the

wheels and handlebars both well below par for a three grand bike. Being aero-orientated it should come with an aero cockpit — even less dedicated road machines do now. Bianchi needs to move with the times if it's to keep up with such fierce competition.

A close second

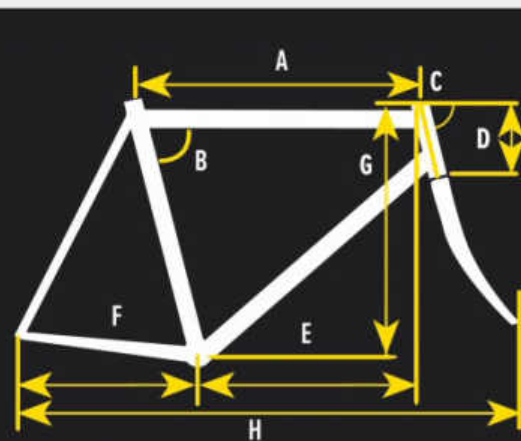
Cannondale claims a close second. Having a disc version in its range means it is pretty much future-proof and it handles nicely, too. Both the Canyon and Cannondale hit the spec sheets running with a more rewarding package. These both sit in the Endurance category so it's interesting that they are given the better specs too. For longer days in the saddle, both will put a smile on your face.

But overall Canyon's Ultimate CF SLX 8.0 took top spot thanks to an excellent package that really delivers on its promise with Shimano Ultegra Di2, Mavic Ksyrium Pro wheels and a decent ride to boot. Its relatively tall head tube offers a comfy ride, and tipping the scales at a mere 6.74kg it's no slouch up the climbs, either. It doesn't handle quite as well as the more racy Specialized and it isn't as cossetting as the all-day comfortable Cannondale — but as an overall package it does more than enough to take the win.

Bikes on test

£3K bikes: what to expect

High-quality carbon frames are the norm at this price point. Most will come fitted with Ultegra or Dura-Ace-level shifting or in some cases SRAM, or Campagnolo's equivalents, or Ultegra Di2. Beware of cheap wheels though — it's an easy place for bike vendors to save some cash.



	Cannondale Synapse	Specialized Tarmac	Canyon Ultimate SLX	Argon 18 Gallium Pro	Bianchi Oltre
Size tested	56cm	54cm	L	M	L
A	561cm	548mm	571mm	560mm	560mm
B	73.5°	73.5°	73.5°	73.5°	73.5°
C	72.5°	73°	73.25°	72.7°	73°
D	186mm	140mm	181mm	139mm	160mm
E	386mm	405mm	399mm	385mm	393mm
F	410mm	505mm	410mm	408mm	407mm
G	590mm	387mm	592mm	564mm	561mm
H	1,000mm	978mm	1003mm	980mm	1,000mm

	Cannondale Synapse Carbon Disc £3,250 9	Specialized Tarmac Expert £3,000 8	Canyon Ultimate SLX 8.0 Di2 £3,199 9	Argon 18 Gallium Pro £3,499.99 9	Bianchi Oltre XR1 £3,000 8
Frame	■■■■■■■■■ 9	■■■■■■■■■ 9	■■■■■■■■■ 9	■■■■■■■■■ 8	■■■■■■■■■ 9
Specification	■■■■■■■■■ 9	■■■■■■■■■ 8	■■■■■■■■■ 10	■■■■■■■■■ 8	■■■■■■■■■ 8
Ride	■■■■■■■■■ 9	■■■■■■■■■ 8	■■■■■■■■■ 9	■■■■■■■■■ 9	■■■■■■■■■ 9
Value	■■■■■■■■■ 9	■■■■■■■■■ 8	■■■■■■■■■ 9	■■■■■■■■■ 8	■■■■■■■■■ 8
Distributor	www.cyclingsportgroup.co.uk	www.specialized.co.uk	www.canyon.com	www.i ride.co.uk	www.cycleurope.com
Frame	Synapse Disc BallisTec carbon	Fact 10r carbon	HMF IMP F01 carbon	Nanotech Tubing HM7050	Oltre XR.1 carbon
Fork	Save Plus all carbon fork	S Works FACT carbon fork	HMF carbon fork	Ga31 Carbon Fork	Bianchi full-carbon fork
Size range	48 61cm	49 64cm	XXS XXL	XXS XL	47 61
Weight	8.02kg / 17.68lb	7.72kg / 17.01lb	6.74kg / 14.83lb	7.56kg/16.66lb	7.76kg/17.10lb
Groupset	Shimano Ultegra Di2	Shimano Ultegra	Shimano Ultegra Di2	Shimano Ultegra	Shimano Ultegra
Gear ratios	50/34, 11 32	52/36t, 11 28t	11 28 52 36	52/36, 11 28	52/36 11 28
Wheels	Mavic Aksium Disc	Fulcrum S4	Shimano WH RS330	Fulcrum Racing Quattro	Fulcrum Racing 7 LG
Brakes	Shimano R785 hydraulic disc	Shimano Ultegra	Shimano Ultegra	Shimano Ultegra	FSA Gossamer Pro
Tyres	Mavic Aksion 28mm	Specialized Turbo Pro 23c	Mavic Ksyrium Pro 700x25c	Vittoria Rubino Pro tyres	Vittoria Zaffiro Pro Slick
Bar	Cannondale C2 Compact alloy	Specialized Expert shallow drop	Canyon H17 Ergo AL	3T Ergosum	Reparto Corse Compact, Alloy 2014
Stem	Cannondale C2 alloy	Specialized Pro SL alloy	Syncros Foil	3T Arx Pro	Reparto Corse
Seatpost	Cannondale C2 25.4mm	S Works FACT Carbon	Canyon S13 VCLS CF	Gallium Pro	Reparto Corse
Saddle	Prologo Kappa Evo	Specialized Toupé Expert Ge	Fizik Antares R5	Prologo Kappa Evo	Selle San Marco Concor



Aluminium bikes

£900-£1,300

Symon Lewis explores what's on offer when you buy aluminium instead of low-end carbon



What?

Carbon seems to be the be-all and end-all at the moment within the bike industry. But if you're strapped for cash but still want a bike that will perform and not wallow underneath you, then aluminium is a great option. The bikes here cost less than £1,500 and come with the lauded Shimano 105 groupset that'll take on any event you like without breaking the bank.

Why

Aluminium is often overlooked, though we firmly believe here at *Cycling Active* that alloy is well worth considering if you're sticking to a tight budget. Basically, don't buy 'cheap' carbon, buy decent aluminium. You'll get a better ride and the same, if not a better spec for the price.

How

We've tested these as we would any other bike, carbon or otherwise. Typical Kent and Surrey roads with the odd criterium to really push the limits. You get a very stern ride from aluminium but it is all very positive, so if you're after an eight-hour cruiser, look elsewhere.

Trek Emonda ALR 5 £1,100

As with its carbon Emonda, Trek aims for 'featherweight' with the aluminium version.

Bowman Palace £1,150 (frameset £650)

A relative newbie to the market, Bowman with its Palace has made good first impressions.

Giant Defy 1 £899

Featuring Giant's Defy endurance geometry for long days in the saddle as well as the D-Fuse seatpost to aid comfort.

Bowman Palace £1,150 (£650 frameset only)



A relative newbie to the market, Bowman Palace makes a good first impression

The Palace's 'more than a race frame' hashtag emphasises the bike's all-round abilities and urges you to look past the name — taken from the fast and technical Crystal Palace crit circuit in South London.

Frame

The Palace uses 6069-T6 aluminium with custom-shaped triple-butt tubes to shave weight and help optimise ride feel and handling. As standard, a full carbon fork is used with large bearings that again, according to Bowman, help keep handling in

check with less pressure and wear rate on the bearings themselves. External cabling, a hard anodised frame finish (or, in the case of our test bike, a green paint job) and space for 28mm tyres means it's easy to maintain and should be able to deal with the rough and tumble of day-to-day riding.

Specification

Bowman only sells framesets but put this build together for us for this test. This Palace is built with a full 105 groupset, offering a pretty racy set-up without breaking the bank. The Fulcrum Racing 5 wheels perform well for the price.

Specification

Frameset 6069 T6 aluminium
Gears Shimano 105
Chainset Shimano 105
Brakes Shimano 105
Wheels Fulcrum Racing 5
Tyres Continental GP 4Season
Bars Deda RHM 01
Stem Deda Zero 2
Saddle Selle San Marco Concor
Seatpost Deda RS01
Weight 8.2kg / 18.04lb
Size tested 54cm
www.bowman-cycles.com

Ride

I've been very impressed with the Bowman. Despite being slightly heavier than the other bikes on test it felt lively and light. Power transfer is impressive and although comfort isn't its forte I've certainly ridden less comfortable aluminum bikes. Aggressive it isn't, but it does have a relatively low front end and feels a little shorter than most — something to bear in mind if you're after a bike that's a little less racy.

Value

On paper the Bowman doesn't look like great value, especially compared to the Giant. For £650 you get the frameset only from Bowman, while with the Giant you get a complete bike for £899. As I've said throughout this group test, these bikes offer up similar specs. But what you do get here is a well-thought-out frame from a smaller independent company that'll stand the test of time.





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#CW125

Giant Defy 1 £899



Ideal for long days in the saddle on less than perfect surfaces

The Defy is for many, the classic sportive bike. The Defy 1 is one model up from entry level in the world's largest bike manufacturer's Defy range.

Frame

The frame is made from Giant's lightweight ALUXX SL aluminium and the fork is composite carbon. Reflecting the primary purpose as a bike to be ridden on long days, the Defy uses Giant's trademark endurance geometry, giving a reach roughly 10mm shorter and front end 10mm higher than the equivalent sized Specialized Allez. The head

tube angle is more relaxed and the wheelbase longer too, while the D-Fuse seatpost has been designed to reduce road vibration.

Specification

Like all the bikes here, the Giant Defy 1 is equipped with a mostly Shimano 105 groupset. You don't get the 105 brakes though, which is a shame and probably the first thing I would upgrade — fortunately the quality of this frame would justify upgrades. Although slightly heavier, the non-105 compact chainset performs without complaint. The wheels and tyres are Giant's own-brand — good

Specification

Frameset ALUXX SL Grade aluminium, full carbon fork with OverDrive Steerer
Gears Shimano 105 11 speed, 11 32t
Chainset 50/34t
Brakes Tekro TK R540
Wheels Giant P R2
Tyres Giant P SL1, f/r specific 25mm
Handlebar Giant Compact 420mm
Stem Giant Sport 100mm
Saddle Giant Performance Road
Seatpost Giant D Fuse composite
Weight 8.8kg / 19.36lb
Size Range S XL
www.giant-bicycles.com

quality entry-level components, if a little heavy.

Riding

The Defy was the most comfortable bike on test. I thoroughly enjoyed the Defy's ability to iron out the road on my regular training routes. The D-shaped seatpost keeps road vibrations to a minimum while the light and stiff frame provides a ride that is responsive and has a surprising amount of zip. The relaxed head tube and geometry enables a more upright position with measured handling. The tall, relaxed head tube can feel a little like a lorry when compared to the Trek, but remains a fun bike to ride.

Value

Giant's frame and own-brand parts are great quality. You don't get the full 105 groupset, but considering the price is considerably less than the other bikes on test, the value is clear.



Brakes are ripe for an upgrade



Tall head tube promotes comfort

Trek Emonda ALR 5 £1,100



A featherweight aluminium frame that's great for climbers

The carbon version of the Trek Emonda was the lightest bike in the world when it was launched in 2014. With this aluminium version Trek is trying to make its featherweight bike more affordable.

Frame

The Emonda ALR frame weighs just 1,050g. If there's a lighter aluminium frame for the money, I haven't seen it.

Unlike some aluminium frames around this price, the welds are incredibly clean and well done, and the frame is also DuoTrap compatible, meaning you can

attach a speed/cadence sensor without the need for zip-ties.

Specification

Like all the bikes here, the Emonda ALR is equipped with a full Shimano 105 groupset, which of course works exceptionally well. This is paired with aluminium finishing kit from Bontrager, all of which performed effectively, although the downgrading from the carbon seatpost on the ALR 6 is a slight disappointment.

The Bontrager wheels are never going to set the world alight, although they are tubeless ready and the 1,700g weight could be

Specification

Frameset Ultralight 300 Series Alpha Aluminium, full carbon fork
Gears Shimano 105, 11 28t cassette
Chainset Shimano 105, 50/34
Brakes Shimano 105
Wheels Bontrager Tubeless Ready
Tyres Bontrager R1 Hard Case Lite, 23mm
Bars Bontrager Race
Stem Bontrager Elite
Saddle Bontrager Paradigm Race
Seatpost Bontrager alloy
Weight 8.4kg (18.5lb)
Size tested 56cm
www.trekbikes.com

worse, considering they've been chosen to keep costs down.

Ride

Thanks to its weight, the Emonda ALR is a bit of a mountain goat, cruising up steady uphill gradients with consummate ease. A wheel upgrade would make it a better climber still, while improving acceleration into the bargain.

Handling is assured on the descents, with the Trek sweeping gracefully through the corners at high speed even with the relaxed geometry encouraging a relatively upright position.

There was a little road buzz to contend with, however. A carbon seatpost and 25mm tyres would surely have helped with this.

Value

The Emonda is a great low-cost option, offering a light aluminium frame that would be perfect for upgrading with lighter wheels and a carbon seatpost.



Quality Shimano 105 groupset



In-house wheels

*Cycling
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ON TEST**



Verdict

Giant smiles on the competition

ONE UP, ONE DOWN

Giant Defy 0 £999

For a penny under £1K you can upgrade to Shimano Ultegra — less chainset and brakes. Wheels and frame stay the same. It's still cheaper than the Trek and Bowman.



Giant Defy 3 £649

A drop in spec to Shimano Sora, a slightly lower grade alloy, and no D-shaped seatpost and you'll get the same Defy geometry for £649. An amazingly good deal!



The aim of this test was to explore what aluminium has to offer and to demonstrate that it is well worth the consideration over lower-priced carbon alternatives.

There is an argument that this material gives a harsh ride and that is evident with all these frames, though with some good clearance, wider tyres and rims along with a mixture of tube shapes and thicknesses the aluminium experience has certainly improved over the years.

Cheaper carbon bikes can often leave you wanting more. Whether it's in terms of spec, ride feel or even stiffness they're usually no match for similar-priced aluminium options.

All the bikes in this test are good enough for any event or even a race straight out of the box — save for the wheelsets maybe for the really special events. If you consider the price and what you'd need to spend on a carbon equivalent — around £2,000 plus — you'll be crazy not to have a glance at the (relatively) old-school frame material giving you a decent bike and finishing kit for around £1,000.

The runners-up

I like the ride of the Bowman, it looks good and rides the best on test. You really feel that thought has been put into every part of the bike to deliver the best possible riding experience, which ultimately will suit a rider who likes a racier set-up and who loves to explore the limits in the corners and likes to attack their rides. Though comfort isn't as good as the Giant and the Trek does well in the weight stakes.

The frame of the Trek sits just over 1,000g, which makes the Trek very lightweight for a £1,100 bike — I like that. So often the penalty is weight and with an upgraded set of wheels this will be an amazing bike for a day's ride in the hills.

The fairly laid back position means you'll be happy for the day too, although the Giant beats it for a smooth ride. The pencil-thin tyres and all-alloy finishing kit doesn't eliminate enough of the road buzz that the UK roads are so good at offering up.



AluXX alloy is tried and tested

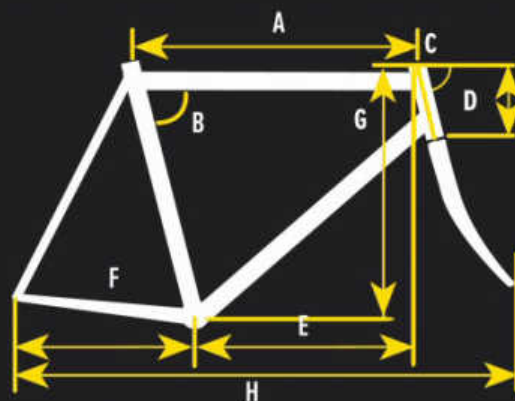
Giant is the winner of this test and not just on value, although you do get a lot of bike for the money. Sadly you can see the corner-cutting in the brakes, and we guess that as Giant has its own finishing kit and wheels that'll bring the costs down too. But these are all quality products and you shouldn't turn your nose up at them.

Giant has proven geometry for all its ranges and the Defy endurance geo works very well, giving you a beautifully handling frameset. It does feel more barge-like compared to the Bowman but the Defy's carbon brother has won the Paris-Roubaix professional race.

I don't think it looks as nice as the Bowman and it isn't as light as the Trek but as an overall package you won't be disappointed.

Geometry Aluminium

At the £1,000 mark, an alloy frame is really worth considering and performs favourably against carbon. As alloy is cheaper you'll get a higher spec, possibly with money to spare for a wheel upgrade. The ride is stiff, but this can be a virtue.



	Bowman Palace £1,150	Giant Defy 1 £899	Trek Emonda ALR 5 £1,100
Size tested	54cm	Large	56cm
A	535mm	560mm	560mm
B	73.5°	73°	73.3°
C	72.5°	72.5°	73.5°
D	140mm	190mm	170mm
E	375mm	586mm	387mm
F	405mm	420mm	410mm
G	542mm	381mm	577mm
H	1,003mm	1,007mm	981mm

Bowman Palace £1,150 (650 framset)	8	Giant Defy 1 £899	9	Trek Emonda ALR 5 £1,100	9
Frame	■■■■■■■■	8	Frame	■■■■■■■■■■	10
Specification	■■■■■■■■	8	Specification	■■■■■■■■■■	9
Ride	■■■■■■■■	8	Ride	■■■■■■■■■■	9
Value	■■■■■■■	7	Value	■■■■■■■■	8

Distributor	www.bowman-cycles.com	www.giant-bicycles.com	www.trek-bikes.com
Frame	6069 T6 aluminium	ALUXX SL Grade Aluminum	Ultralight 300 Series Alpha Aluminium
Fork	Full carbon, tapered steerer	Hybrid Composite, OverDrive Steerer	Full carbon fork
Size range	50-60cm	S-XL	50-64cm
Weight	8.2kg / 18.04lb	8.8kg / 19.36lb	8.4kg / 18.5lb
Groupset	Shimano 105	Shimano 105	Shimano 105
Gear ratios	50/34, 11-28	50/34t, 11-32t	50/34t, 11-28t
Wheels	Fulcrum Racing 5	Giant P-R2	Bontrager Tubeless Ready
Brakes	Shimano 105	Tektro TK-R540	Shimano 105
Tyres	Continental GP 4Seasons	Giant P-SL1, Front and Rear Specific 25mm	Bontrager R1 Hard Case Lite, 23mm
Bars	Deda RHM 01	Giant Compact 420mm	Bontrager Race
Stem	Deda Zero 2	Giant Sport 100mm	Bontrager Elite
Seatpost	Deda RS01	Giant D-Fuse composite	Bontrager alloy
Saddle	Selle San Marco Concor	Giant Performance Road	Bontrager Paradigm Race

GROUPTEST

Bike racks

Jamie Darlow tests four of the finest roof racks

What?

Putting your bike inside your car with the seats down is a good way to carry it, as it's quick and secure... but if there's more than one of you travelling, your car is small or you just don't want road grime and oil all over your seats, there's only one place to go — outside and onto a roof-mounted bike rack.

Why?

On the roof is the easiest place for a rack because you don't need to get an expensive towball and electrical trimmings fitted, and roof-mounted racks are generally cheaper. The other option is a boot-mounted rack but they can be a faff to fit, rub your bike or car's paintwork, often aren't as secure and can obscure the number plate.

How?

All you need for decent bike portage then is some roof bars, and of course a bike rack. There are two methods that all rack companies use to hold your bike securely — they either use your bike's fork and axle to clamp the bike into place, or they use securing arms to grip your bike and wheels. We've got both on test and while they both have advantages and disadvantages it's really all about what works for your life.

Look out for

Spend a bit of time working out which rack is best for you. If you're covering big miles on the motorway then getting the bike as low as possible is a priority: alternatively, if it's just for short trips then the quickest fitting rack is probably best. Think about how many bikes you need to carry too, and whether a hefty investment in a four-bike carrier, or even a fitted towbar, might pay off over time. Finally, look for a rack that fits all your bikes.



Dos and don'ts

- Do buy a little plastic kick stool or step to carry in your boot — it will save your back and makes lifting the bike into place easier
- Don't leave your bike on the roof and go for a coffee — it's not secure. Alternatively, invest in a big chain and padlock.
- Do check that all the fittings on your rack and bars are nipped up tight, and that your skewers are tight... check them every trip.
- Don't use underground car parks — scraping your beautiful bike on a low-hanging shutter or roof will make you cry.

Mont Blanc RoofSprint £143.95

The RoofSprint is a good rack for those looking for convenience because there's no need to pop a wheel out of your bike and secure it with the fork mount.

Instead, the bike rests on its wheels in the bike tray, which has deep sides to hold your wheels securely. Each wheel then gets strapped into place with plastic straps that ratchet closed.



Maximum
bike weight
17kg

The main support for your bike comes from the big aluminium arm with rubbery jaws that clamp to your down tube close to the BB shell and stop the bike wobbling from side to side. They're asymmetrical, which is a clever idea because you can get in close to the BB shell and dodge round the chainrings, and they really do clamp up tightly.

It's more of a faff to get a bike into the RoofSprint though than it is to use the Thule Proride. The Proride uses a ratchet to close its jaws, while the RoofSprint uses a gimbal, so you have to tension the bolts up accurately to get the correct amount of pressure. Still, you only need fit it once. The RoofSprint jaws are also prone to sliding up and down their arm as you try and heft the bike into position.

The trays your bike sit in are another good idea from Mont Blanc but

in practice don't quite work. The deep-sided tray holds your front wheel, but it's too narrow for knobbly mountain bike tyres and too wide to offer any effective support for road tyres. In fact, it seems to be purely ornamental as there are grooves on the bottom of the tray that hold the tyre, and the plastic traps prevent the wheels from moving.

There's one more minor issue worth noting, and that's security — if you go for this rack you can lock the jaws closed with a key, but there's nothing to lock the bike to the roofbars, a slight omission you need to be aware of if buying one. The RoofSprint is well made, fairly easy to use but it's undone by the fact that it's more expensive than the superior Thule and less easy to use.

7

www.montblancgroup.com



Pendle Fork Mount Roof Rack £88.25

You might not have heard of Pendle — the Lancashire-based firm specialises in big engineering products in metal. Fortunately for us though, it also turns that engineering nous onto bike racks, producing well-engineered products that are simple but effective.

This rack requires you to take the front wheel out of your bike, before hoisting it onto the roof

of your car. The fork dropouts then simply slot into the rack's quick-release mount and the rear wheel is secured with a big toe-strap style nylon binding. If you've got a mountain bike you can also get 15mm or 20mm axle mounts for the Pendle. What to do with the front

wheel though? We found that by using a couple of extra toe-straps, you can lash the front wheel to the frame and maximise storage space inside your car — sit the wheel on the pedal and use one toe-strap to lash it to the bars and the other to secure it to the chainstay.

So it's one of the simplest racks you can buy, but also one of the most effective. The bike is held very firmly with less wobble than the Mont Blanc or Thule, thanks to the secure fork clamp, and while it's not as slick-looking as the

others here it's the cheapest rack on test. It also places your bike lower down than either the Mont Blanc or Thule, so there's less of it to drag in the wind and ruin your car's fuel efficiency.

Like all these racks though, the Pendle isn't perfect. Heaving your bike up and slotting it neatly into the fork mounts can be tricky if you're not tall or strong of arm, so do get a kick stool to make things easier. And because the fork mount doubles as the clamp to the front roof bar, on some bike and car combos it's difficult to get the rear wheel holder far enough forward to allow the boot to open on a small hatchback — you can easily cut the extrusion to length with a hacksaw though. Overall though it's a great rack, brilliant value and well secured.

9

www.pendle-bike.co.uk

Maximum
bike weight
17kg



SeaSucker Talon £299.99

This innovative rack uses three big suckers that vacuum to your car. You can then mount the bike using your fork's dropouts, just like with the Pendle rack, while the rear wheel sits on a fourth, independent sucker and gets Velcroed into place.

If you're worried about the suction not being strong enough, there's no need — it's unbelievably strong, and more than capable of holding your bike. After all, this vacuum technology is how the construction industry moves big panes of glass. All the same, when you first start using it you'd be forgiven for feeling slightly uneasy as you whip along the motorway with a 70mph wind jostling your bike and no metal nuts and bolts holding things in place. Our suckers never failed though, and we've been using the Talon for over six months

now. We've also been using an early prototype from the US for more than two years without failure, so you really can be sure the SeaSucker works.

There are some really big advantages to using this rack then, principally that you don't need roof bars or their mountings to use it. It's expensive at



Maximum
bike weight
20.4kg

£300 but factor in the fact you don't need to buy those roof bars and it's comparable with the Thule or Mont Blanc. It's also very easy to attach, suckering on in less than a minute, and you can be really creative and imaginative in where you put your bike and rack — during testing we secured one to the back of an SUV, where it's easier to get to and well out of the wind. It's portable too, so when you're not riding it can simply live in the boot.

Disadvantages then... you wouldn't want to leave your bike anywhere with this one, as it's very easy for a thief to remove the entire rack and bike, and there's no adding a lock to it to secure things. Precious car owners might be alarmed about how the rack leeches onto their roof too, because the weight of a bike does flex the metal around somewhat, and although we've not had any damage or distortion that flex makes the rack ever so slightly less solid than the Pendle. Overall though, it's a great piece of kit.

9

www.seasucker.com



Thule ProRide 598 £100

The Thule ProRide works by supporting your bike on its own two wheels on a metal base that runs the length of the rack, so there's no need to take any wheels out. There are ridges running the length of it to better hold the tyres secure and the rack works on everything from 23c road tyres to 3in Plus-size knobbies.

Your bike is then held upright by a big cantilever arm with soft,

rubbery jaws that clamp around the down tube, ratcheting up tight. The jaws cinch closed with a big easy-to-use dial that you can then lock closed — don't leave it unattended though, as we know of several cases where thieves have worked a bike loose, lock notwithstanding.

It's a clever system because the jaws roll your bike forward or back into roughly the right place for the wheel straps, which then loop over your rims and add more stability. These diagonal wheel straps are easy to tension, using a ratchet system much like you'll find on your cycling shoes.

The ProRide is the easiest and quickest roof rack to get your bike into because you don't have to pop a wheel out to use it. Your bike will wobble slightly with the Thule, but it is totally secure — we've been using this model for months and the older, near-identical model nearly five years without incident. We've tried to

shake a bike loose with spirited driving, but the Thule holds firm and the new model has more depth to its jaws and softer rubber to give an even harder bite.

There are a few problems with the Thule, chiefly that, just like the Mont Blanc, a carbon-fibre bike isn't designed to have clamping pressure on what is one of the thinnest-tubed areas of the bike. We've also had some minor scratches on the paintwork caused by a gritty bike and the small movement of the bike in the jaws. The rack also puts your bike extremely high, making a serious dent in your fuel economy — maybe as much as 10mpg, we've estimated. Thule's fork-mounted rack is lower, while its towbar rack is even more out of the wind. It's our test winner for the blend of convenience, stability and price.

www.madison.co.uk

Maximum
bike weight
20kg



10



GROUPTEST Bibshorts

James Bracey tests 10 bibshorts that will see you comfortably through the long miles

What?

A comfortable pair of shorts can be worth their weight in gold when it comes to enjoying your cycling. Bibshorts offer the most comfort of any padded short and most riders swear by their favourite model. We have looked at 10 pairs that are designed with long rides in mind.

Why?

Comfort is king when it comes to choosing bibshorts. Most brands will be using high-end, multi-density seatpad

construction for comfort. Construction will use specific fabrics chosen for their properties — such as compression, flexibility or comfort — and placed in specific areas of the short, depending on what property is required in that area.

How?

All the shorts were ridden on the same bike with the same saddle, to give a fair test of their comparative comfort levels. Consideration has also been given to fit, temperature regulation and long-term durability.

KEY FEATURES

Fit

An articulated cut based around normal body movement is imperative.

Comfort

For long hours on the bike the padded insert must work for your body.

Temperature control

The enclosed bib design needs to manage moisture movement well.

HOW WE SCORE

- 10 - Superb, best in its class and we couldn't fault it
- 9 - Excellent, a slight change and it would be perfect
- 8 - Brilliant, we'd happily buy it
- 7 - Solid, but there's better out there
- 6 - Pretty good, but not quite hitting the mark
- 5 - OK, nothing wrong with it, but nothing special
- 4 - A few niggles let this down
- 3 - Disappointing
- 2 - Poor, approach with caution
- 1 - Terrible, do not buy this product

Dhb Aeron Speed £80

The Aeron Speed represents the acme of dhb's current range of shorts. Made from Revolutionary Energy fabric, they have a high level of compression and are designed to minimise muscle fatigue without too much restriction. In use, the material feels stiffer than most

Weight
169
grams

other fabrics and is slightly unyielding; if you don't fill the shorts fully you are left with a few stiff creases. The shorts benefit from Coldblack technology and have a high level of

breathability. The Speed's CyTech's Comp HP chamois insert is designed for long-distance comfort.

At the rear, the bib straps are a minimal design and are made of mesh to increase sweat wicking and prevent windchill. The front straps are wide, thin, and elasticated, and sit comfortably across the body. A wide silicone gripper panel around the outer two thirds of the leg holds the shorts in place. These shorts are comfortable for longer rides and the stiffer material provides good muscle support. The pad is one of the best I have used and offers all-day comfort.

8

Sizes: XS-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black, black/blue, black/green

www.wiggle.co.uk



Altura Podium Elite £99.99

Altura has recently undergone a complete relaunch of its apparel ranges, implementing new design and manufacturing processes. It shows: the Podium Elite is a vastly improved product, benefitting from new technologies and Altura's partnership

with One Pro Cycling.

Weight

173
grams

The fabric is soft and supportive but where they really win is in the fit. Altura utilise their ErgoFit 3D patterning and this makes the Podium one of the best-fitting

shorts around. They conform perfectly to natural cycling movement without restriction and Altura's proprietary Dry moisture management process helps keeps you comfortable.

The bibs extend comfortably around the mid section without being too high, the mesh shoulder straps sit flat with very little movement. A neat touch are the two small, easily accessible pockets at the back of the bibs, allowing extra storage. The Pro 3D insert is comfortable without being overly bulky and is perforated to disperse sweat. All in, then, a great choice.

10

Sizes: S-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black

www.zyro.co.uk



Stolen Goat Bodyline One £98

Founded in 2012, single-man UK brand Stolen Goat has steadily gathered a reputation thanks to its fashionable, well-thought-out clothing.

The distinctive honeycomb texture of the material used throughout the short is completely different to most standard

Weight

190
grams

Lycra-based materials; it feels light and airy against the skin and has a distinctive look. Moisture movement in hot conditions is superb, with the added ColdBlack UV reflective treatment

keeping body temperature down.

The One in the name denotes the fact that there is only one seam throughout the entire short, the legs benefitting from a circular knit process reducing irritation and giving a uniform level of compression. Stolen Goat have given these shorts a modern, longer cut with a subtle logo sublimated into the elasticated leg gripper. Stolen Goat use their own very capable insert, developed alongside pro riders in Belgium. Its dimpled design proved very comfortable throughout the period.

9

Sizes: S-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black, black/Belgian blue, black/red, black/team green

www.stolengoat.com



Pearl Izumi Elite Pursuit Ltd £109.99

The Elite Pursuit Ltd shorts, with their patterned graphics, are distinctive and bold. The blue shorts here match their respective jersey but the Elite is also available in a more subtle black and grey finish. Utilising what Pearl Izumi call their Transfer In-R-Cool material gives the short a pleasant feel during hotter rides.

Weight

148
grams

The cut is performance-based and snug and the level of comfort improves when in a more aggressive position. The raw edge to

the short looks great and almost allows the short to blend in with your skin. Watch out for the shiny blue graphics though, they tend to stretch out and look faded when riding, so be aware if you have bigger thighs. The bib design is very traditional, with a full mesh fabric stitched on all seams. There is little proper elastication to this fabric so it does bunch up when first putting on the shorts but stays put when riding. The 1:1 insert is made from four-way stretch material and gave a very comfortable, irritation-free area, enabling hours of pain-free time in the saddle.

8

Sizes: S-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black/grey, blue/black

www.madison.co.uk



Castelli Free Aero Race £130

The redesigned Free Aero has factored in some of the slight issues of previous incarnations and given the design a tweak. Rather than being made from a single material, Castelli has introduced a shoulder yoke that's made from a more robust fabric that helps the straps lie

Weight

164
grams

perfectly flat across the body. This also minimises material and increases breathability and strap comfort across the upper body.

The excellent Progetto X2 chamois insert has a new, softer cover but thankfully remains one of the most comfortable pads I have ever used. The legs have been updated with a longer cut and now have a more compressive fit to offer greater support on longer rides. The leg-gripper section, now called the Giro Air leg band, is much longer and doesn't compress the leg as much as the older version. It is also a mesh material to allow better ventilation. Castelli has also thought about the Aero in the name and the side panels have a dimpled appearance which increases their aerodynamic gains.

9

Sizes: S-XXXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black, black/white, black/red, black/blue, black/yellow, black/green
www.saddleback.com



Rapha Pro Team £190

Rapha's higher-end offering has a very different feel to most of the other shorts on test and offers an understated but classy design. The myriad of smaller panels that make up the shorts are designed to optimise the cut and movement of the material to match

Weight

180
grams

those of the leg muscles during cycling. What this does bring is a very snug, compressive feel to the shorts that feels reassuringly supportive on longer rides.

Rapha offers the Pro Team in a regular or long length, doubling the options available. The insert comes from Italian company E.I.T. and is certainly aimed at long-term comfort, being quite thick and bulky in areas.

The lighter weight bib material looks great and feels comfortable against the skin but I suffered from the lack of stretch in the material – as I've a long torso I ended up with the bibs pulling the pad into an uncomfortable position in my usual medium size. Going up to a large ended up with the leg material being too baggy around the pad. There's no getting away from the premium price either.

7

Sizes: XS-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black/dark grey, black/white, black/high-vis pin
www.rapha.cc



Lusso Peloton Pro £94.99

Making quality cycling apparel without fuss has been Lusso's MO since 1982. The Peloton Pro is fully made in the UK and is designed as your go-to short for all-day epic riding. The first thing that hits you about the new Lusso range is the quality of finish. These compete

Weight

184
grams

happily with the big boys on looks and performance.

Lusso employ CoolTech plus fabrics in the construction in various guises. The side panels have the same ribbed pattern that's used on aero skinsuits, lending kudos to the shorts.

The panelled fit is very good, with the material following the body's contours exceptionally well without being too restrictive. The mesh bib strap and upper portions of the short are very comfortable and stretchy, lending the shorts good wicking and temperature control – the only gripe being the mesh comes into view if wearing a shorter-fitting jersey. The 45mm-wide silicone leg grippers grip the thigh well without being too tight. Lusso's long-distance pad is 14mm thick in places and made riding a comfortable experience.

8

Sizes: S-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black
www.lusso.bike



Northwave Lightning £89.99

Northwave's Lightning short is, according to the Italian company their "best ever". The stealthy, almost fully black short should match any outfit you choose to wear. Northwave have used bio mapping to determine the shape of the panels, ensuring the shorts stay put and apply a

Weight
161
grams

gentle compression throughout the pedal stroke. They certainly feel quite tight initially but the raw edge of the leg and lack of end gripper reduces the chances of 'sausage leg'.

Keeping the seamless theme going, the bib straps are thermowelded together to reduce chafing and sit comfortably across the shoulders. The back panel, despite being a mesh construction, covers a large area of the back. This does inhibit breathability a little, especially in the heat or when working hard. The KD 130 pad looks odd at first glance. With a taped seam along the middle of the insert, I was unsure of its comfort but my fears proved groundless as it performed admirably on some fairly lengthy, sweaty excursions, with no untoward discomfort.

8

Sizes: S-XXXL (Medium tested)
Colours: Black
www.i-ride.co.uk



Santini Mago £99.99

Santini produce a huge range of bibshorts that all have slightly varying performance and design benefits to encompass all types of riding. The Mago is aimed at the rider just wanting one pair of shorts for all occasions.

At the heart of the short is what Santini like to call Thunderbike Power fabric. This is a slightly heavier weight

Weight
203
grams

Lycra type material that gives the shorts a reassuring feel of quality and durability. The cut is similar to that used for its professional team's shorts so gives an excellent on-bike fit that allows the

shorts to practically disappear from your thoughts when out riding. The Y-shaped bib straps reduce overheating and are stretchy without feeling too loose.

Santini have utilised gel padding in their seat inserts for several years and the new NAT chamois has a gel core that serves to provide excellent comfort in the saddle. The downside to the gel padding is the Mago is the heaviest short on test but this is certainly not noticeable when wearing them.

The style is fine in the plain black version but the red and blue options do look a tad old-fashioned.

9

Sizes: XS-XXXL (Medium tested)
Colours: Black, black/red, black/blue
www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk



Gore Bike Wear Power £99.99

Gore's understated shorts don't shout about performance but boast Gore's most advanced design yet. Gore has designed these shorts to perform optimally during three-hour rides. The main short fabric has a soft and light feel that is in direct contrast to some of the

Weight
159
grams

more compression-based shorts in the test. In use, the material almost feels loose in comparison and the cut does make some of the panels wrinkle slightly if you do not 'fill' the shorts.

An innovative feature of the shorts that certainly is of benefit during spring and autumn riding is the windproof front panel that offers a little more protection than normal for your delicate areas! The mesh bib is very comfortable. Once again it is made of a very light, mesh material that aids temperature control and sweat wicking. I did find the single seam design causes the strap to roll up on first fitting but this is soon rectified with no issues. Gore's seat pad is not as thick as others but it is certainly adequate for the ride duration for which this short is designed.

7

Sizes: S-XXL
Colours: Black
www.goreapparel.co.uk



GROUPTEST

Women's shoes

Hannah Bussey tests four women's specific high-performance road shoes

What?

Race shoes need to be stiff enough to transfer every watt of power your legs put through the cranks, but comfortable enough to wear for several hours. Like any top-end race product, there's a balance to be struck between weight and strength. Meeting all these requirements is no mean feat, so we're testing the top four women's specific shoes to discover who makes the ultimate racing shoe.

Why?

Race shoes that are replicas of those worn by the stars of the pro peloton are nothing new. The trouble is, often only the larger sizes are available and for

many women there's not always a suitable option. Happily manufacturers have responded to demands for high quality, performance-oriented women's specific race shoes.

How?

Each shoe has been given a series of two-hour rides, allowing us to hammer the pedals on flat sprints and hill-climbs, as well feeling overall comfort. We've manhandled them to test the soles' lateral and torsional strength, but recognise the shoe needs to be more than stiff, so we've hopped on the turbo to assess the support each shoe gives the foot while riding at a shorter effort too.

HOW WE SCORE See page 94.

Bontrager Meraj £169.99

As the cheapest on test by £60, I was impressed from the outset that these weighed just four grams more than the credit card-crushing S-Works 6. Like

Weight
390
grams

the S-Works 6, the Meraj also features a Boa dial closure system and a Velcro toe-strap.

The Boa cable system applies an even closure with no noticeable pressure points and is easily adjustable on the move. The Meraj's carbon/fibreglass composite sole sits at 10 on Bontrager's 0-14 stiffness index. A slight flex is noticeable when undertaking the hands-on lateral strength test as well as when bouncing on the pedals.

That said, this is a very comfortable pair of shoes. The cushioned 'InForm Pro' footbed and heel cup means that spending all day in these wouldn't be an issue. As an out-and-out race shoe, however, you may find these wanting and the mesh panelling at the toe box of the synthetic upper lets them down a little in the 'high-end' looks department.

It is very hard to ignore the relatively low price though, and Bontrager's shoes represent excellent value for money.

7

Colours: white/cyan

Sizes: EU36 to 43 inc half sizes

www.trekbikes.com

KEY FEATURES

Closures

Even distribution provides a snug, secure fit while avoiding undue pressure or pinch points.

Soles

Stiffness needs to be balanced with sufficient support and ventilation.

Stack

Stack height can be lower on carbon soles, meaning you may need to adjust your saddle height.



Giro W Empire ACC £229.99

With ratchets and Velcro being the most popular closure system, the Empire ACC stands out with its classy, old-school lace-ups. With their one-piece microfibre upper and no nuts or bolts I was

Weight

394
grams

surprised the Empires weren't the lightest on test, but the meaty Easton Carbon 90 ACC soles add a few grams, even if they are low in stack height.

The best thing about laces is the range of adjustment, and with a choice of three arch supports included in the box, a fit bordering on bespoke can be achieved. The downside is that it's near-on

impossible to adjust the fit on the move and it's easy to get a bit keen and overtighten the laces so you'll definitely want to experiment before your first event.

Once correctly adjusted, the Empires are incredibly comfortable, with padding in all the right places along with superb torsional and lateral stiffness.

The other plus point is that laces are much cheaper to replace than cables and dials, should they get damaged in a crash. The Empire came up small on me, so worth checking before you buy.

Colours: gloss black

Sizes: EU 36 to 42 inc some half sizes

www.zyro.co.uk



8

Specialized S-Works 6 £280

With two Boa dials and a Velcro toe-strap, I was impressed that these are the lightest shoes on test. Specialized has put a lot of R&D into its women's products, so it's no surprise to see that the S-Works 6 sit under its Body Geometry umbrella in

Weight

386
grams

terms of sole construction and footbed fit. While ergonomically they're designed to be sligher than the men's version, Specialized says they still have the same performance attributes and use the same top-end FACT Powerline carbon sole and lightweight one-piece Dyneema (a man-made fibre 30 per cent lighter than nylon) upper.

The S-Works 6 have the highest volume on test. With my narrow feet, this meant a slight fold in the

tongue formed where the Velcro had to be pulled in tightly. This could cause premature wear, so getting the right size is crucial. A low heel cup is these shoes' other quirk.

This stiff shoe feels super-efficient with great power transfer, as you'd expect. But with every detail performance driven, there's little space for comfort, making them an out-and-out thoroughbred pair of race shoes.

9

Colour: white

Sizes: EU 37 to 43 inc half sizes

www.specialized.com



BEST ON TEST

Sidi Wire Air Carbon £300

If this test was based purely on looks, the Sidis would win hands-down. While I can't verify Sidi's various women's

Weight

560
grams

specific biological claims, they did fit my feet in all the right places. This is most likely down to multiple adjustment points that enable you to dial the fit of the man-made upper

precisely to your instep and heel via two dials. While these provide a very secure fit, I suspect they are also responsible for the Sidis' excess weight — these are by far the heaviest shoes on test.

Pairing these features with a very firm vented carbon sole makes for an incredibly stiff shoe with a low stack height.

The stiffness of the tongue against my ankle was noticeable after half an hour or so — I'm hoping this will soften in time, as I really don't want to have to take a pair of scissors to them. Like the Giros, these come up very small, so do

check before you buy.

Colours: white/pink fluo

Sizes: EU 38-43 inc

half sizes

www.saddleback.co.uk

9

Packable rain jackets

With drizzle being the UK's default weather, we ride through it with seven of the best jackets

What?

With the fickle nature of our weather it pays to be protected and sometimes only a waterproof jacket will do. The problem with most jackets is they tend to be quite bulky, so what do you do when the sun comes out? We have tested seven packable rain jackets, offering varying weather protection, in a size small enough to stuff in a jersey pocket.

Why?

Unless it is set to rain for the entirety of a ride, the ability to take off and stow a

waterproof jacket when conditions improve is advantageous. Carrying a packable jacket can prove invaluable for keeping warm during breaks in riding and are perfect for keeping the wind off when tackling big alpine descents.

How?

Jackets were rated not only on their level of waterproofing but also on how their ability to regulate body temperature and moisture movement. Packability and fit were also key considerations.

HOW WE SCORE See page 82

KEY FEATURES

Weather protection

The jacket should be able to deal with differing amounts of rain/wind

Packability

The jacket should pack small enough to fit comfortably in a jersey pocket

Fit

A jacket needs to fit properly – not too tight across the shoulders but also not too baggy to catch in the wind

Pearl Izumi Elite Barrier £69.99

The Elite Barrier jacket falls into the lighter end of weather protection, perfect for days when it possibly might rain at some point or for when an extra layer of protection is needed. The Select Barrier fabric is used for the entire jacket and is

Weight

179
grams

certainly very windproof. It shrugs off light rain showers but continuous downpours soon overwhelm the jacket's material and this, combined with the non-taped seams, allows water ingress.

The cut of the Barrier is 'semi-form' fit and this translates to a loose, unrestrictive jacket. It has some of the longest sleeves on test, so is a good choice for the longer-limbed amongst us. The relaxed fit is great for shorter or more recreational rides but the excess material of the sleeves and body cause it to catch in the wind, creating an effective windbreak that limits its performance.

I also found that the zip caught on the storm flap, making fully doing the jacket up a fiddly affair. On the plus side, the Barrier packs down nice and small, easily fitting in a pocket. It also features a large rear pocket for on-bike practicality. A relatively good option for lighter protection on steadier rides.

7

www.madison.co.uk

Sizes: S-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Red/black, Blue/blue, Screamin yellow, Fluoro green, Red



Endura FS-260 Pro SL Shell £139.99

The Pro SL Shell is a fully featured waterproof jacket made from lightweight Exoshell40 material. This is a three-layer material aimed at giving complete waterproofing without compromising breathability.

The areas around the shoulders, cuffs and sides are made from a stretchy waterproof material, enabling comfortable movement whilst on the bike.

I would have liked to have seen the back being slightly longer — the internal Endura logo helps keep the jacket in place but it did ride up higher than I would have liked at times. The Pro Shell has a twin storm flap protecting the vulnerable zip area and fully taped seams for full protection. It's safe to say with a product designed and developed in Scotland that even during prolonged rain I never got properly wet inside the jacket. Breathability is as good as it gets during hard exercise.

Some sweat inevitably builds up but the large side access zip helps with air circulation. A handy loop tucked away in the collar helps to pack the jacket down small enough to just fit in a pocket.

www.endurasport.com

Sizes: S-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black, Hi-Viz Green



Weight
218
grams

Sportful Hotpack Norain £120

Sportful have managed to combine a properly waterproof jacket with a tiny pack size to create the Hotpack Norain jacket. Its stripped-down, barebones construction might lose out to some jackets for practical all-day use but it

certainly beats most when it comes to out-and-out rain protection. A combination of Sportful's proprietary Aquashield and Micro Shell Stretch materials, both of which are rated waterproof to 10,000mm, plus fully sealed seams means the jacket holds up exceptionally well to heavy rain.

The stretchy fabrics aid the performance cut to create a fit that reduces superfluous material to a minimum, allowing the jacket to perform brilliantly during fast-paced rides and descents. Sweat build-up was certainly acceptable during hard efforts and only once did I feel like I needed to take off a layer underneath. In order to create such a small pack size the Norain misses out on any real practical features barring the one tiny rear pocket that houses the stuff-sack. The only other improvement I would like is a slightly longer tail for really keeping you dry in the wet.

Weight
138
grams

Mavic Cosmic Elite H2O £100

The Cosmic Elite is the most substantial jacket on test whilst still being small enough to bundle into a pocket when the need arises. The Rain Ride main fabric has been waterproof tested to a rating of 10,000mm so will withstand even the heaviest down-pours without leakage.

Compared to some of the more stripped down jackets on test the Cosmic is fully featured, making it a jacket you can use every day. It not only has three full-sized rear pockets but also includes a handy chest pocket that doubles up as an extra vent in warmer conditions. It also

features a fully lined back panel to transfer moisture away from you, allowing it to feel more comfortable for longer periods. Fit is excellent, the body is not too baggy whilst the arms remain long and relatively snug fitting; however, the reverse Velcro fastening cuffs were a little tricky to fasten. The Cosmic, at 275g, is no lightweight but its practicality does make up for it.

www.mavic.co.uk

Sizes: S-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black, White



8

9

www.c3products.com

Sizes: XS-XXXL (Medium tested)

Colours: White, Black, Fluoro yellow

Altura Podium Lite £74.99

This offering from Altura is as close to the traditional race cape as it gets, with its semi-translucent material clearly displaying your kit choice underneath. The

Weight

117
grams

Podium Lite uses much more modern materials to create a lightweight jacket with reasonable weatherproofing. The Shield fabric is substantial enough to provide protection from light rain or brief showers

but lacks protection at the seams so heavier rain will make its way through.

It performs as well as expected in these conditions. One benefit of the lower level of waterproofing is an increased ability to transfer heat and moisture so the Podium Lite doesn't end up feeling 'boil-in-the-bag' as much as some others. Underarm vents also help temperature control. The performance ErgoFit 3D pattern gives a very comfortable on-bike fit with no tightness across the shoulders. Sleeves are relatively narrow but as with the rest of the jacket, they can be prone to a bit of wind noise. A small zipped opening at the rear allows access to jersey pockets underneath but that and a narrow storm flap are the only concessions to practicality but the upside is a tiny pack size, easily fitting in a pocket.

8

www.zyro.co.uk

Sizes: S-XXL (medium tested)

Colours: White, Hi Viz Yellow



Rapha Pro Team Race Cape £195

The first thing you notice about the Race Cape is the cut — the sleeves are highly articulated, the front is very short and the tail is dropped. Rapha have really thought about the use and when in a 'long and low' position it fits perfectly. A fully waterproof three-ply main material is used in conjunction with stretchier, more breathable panels under the arms and on the sides. The narrow storm flap protects the easy to use zip and also includes a Velcro section that can be used to hold the

Weight

199
grams

jacket in place without using the zip to enable better airflow. The fit is better than simply any other jacket I have tried, the sleeves are perfect and the long zips make putting it on a simple task.

There is minimal wind flap and the dropped tail comfortably fits over full pockets whilst protecting your rear quite well. As expected, it remained properly waterproof and as with the other substantial jackets I was happy with the level of breathability provided. As a stripped down race cape it packs away reasonably well into a pocket but it does lack any form of storage itself. The cost is also slightly difficult to ignore.

8



www.rapha.cc

Sizes: XS-XXL (Medium tested)

Colours: Black, Light blue

Castelli Riparo £120

Castelli market the Riparo as an emergency shell but it is a little bit more than that. Whilst it might not have the kudos of the eVent fabric of its more expensive brethren, it does still enjoy a construction made from entirely waterproof materials. Castelli use a multilayer Torrent IV waterproof material and join it all together with fully taped seams to make a weathertight garment.

Weight

174
grams

A proper waterproof zip that isn't too stiff to use is present along with a storm flap to provide protection.

It withstood heavy rain admirably and whilst

sweat and heat built up quickly when working hard, it performed very well during steadier rides.

The fit is well thought out, although the front panels are a little too long, making it bunch up when bent over in a lower position. I also felt the tail panels had the opposite issue and needed to be extended for a little more rear protection. Practicality is relatively high with a large rear pocket present that also doubles as a stuff sack for when conditions allow straightforward stowage in a rear pocket.

8



www.saddleback.co.uk

Sizes: S-XXXL (medium tested)

Colours: Black, Yello fluo, Drive blue

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Are latex inner tubes faster?

Oliver Bridgewood investigates the long-held belief that exotic latex inner tubes can give a performance advantage over their common or garden butyl counterparts

Inner tubes fall broadly into two different types: latex and butyl rubber. Butyl tubes are the standard default choice for most of us and come fitted as standard with pretty much every bike. They typically cost around £4-5 in most bike shops.

Butyl tubes are made from synthetic black rubber, while latex tubes are made from the sap obtained from rubber trees. This rubber is far more fragile than butyl rubber and owing to more time-consuming production, latex tubes are more expensive too. Butyl tubes get the job done fine, so why would you choose to go latex?

In a word — speed. Every cycling club seems to have a wily old veteran who will have at some point during their many dispersions of wisdom, extolled the virtues of latex tubes. Based purely on anecdotal evidence of what they used in ‘their day’ they preach that you should use latex.

Unsurprisingly, manufacturers of latex tubes also claim they are faster. John Heasman, product promoter at Vittoria suggested that “a standard

butyl tube adds roughly five watts per tyre” when compared with latex. Five watts might not sound like much, but over the course of a long ride or time trial it would be significant. To find out if this was just marketing hyperbole, I carried out an experiment.

Appliance of science

I fitted Continental Grand Prix tyres with and without latex tubes and rode them on a set of rollers. I measured the power with a Powertap G3 hub and recorded the speed achieved for a given power output.

For consistency, the tyres were inflated to 100psi using a digital gauge. Each set-up was ridden at 280W for five minutes to allow it to warm up, whereupon they were ridden at a constant power of 300W for five minutes.

To ensure even weight distribution, a constant riding position was maintained on the hoods and the weight of the bike and rider was recorded before each test. Any slight differences in weight or power output were factored into the final calculations. The Fit. files were put into Matlab and the inertia was corrected for each tyre. The result was that latex tubes were 5-5.5 watts faster per tyre using this methodology.

The results were consistent with Vittoria’s claims and suggest that by using latex inner tubes you indeed have lower rolling resistance, therefore allowing you to travel faster for the same effort. But, before we all go out and blow our dough, are there any downsides?

Firstly there is the cost: latex tubes typically cost around £13 depending on the brand and where you shop.

Next is fitting. Latex tubes are very thin and supple, meaning that installing them is more of a faff than a normal inner tube. The main problem arises with seating the tube inside the rim and making sure it doesn’t get caught under the tyre bead. While testing tubes for this feature I did experience a loud bang, after pumping up a tyre with the tube trapped slightly under the bead.

Also, if your rim tape is not properly installed a latex tube is likely to find its way into small gaps, causing it to tear. This is, however, not a problem if you are using tubulars which offer a perfect housing for latex tubes. They can also be damaged/compromised by oils and solvents but in my experience, as long as you don’t go spraying WD40 around like its Febreze you’ll be OK.

The last time I had to write the word porosity was during GCSE geography, but it should also be considered with regards to latex, as they are porous. Air



Vittoria Latex 700 £12.99
Challenge Super Lite
Corsa £13

Two Italian brands, Vittoria and Challenge both produce latex tubes.



leaks out of them, meaning that your tyres will deflate quicker than using butyl. I tested this and found that a 25mm tyre would go from 100 to ~85 psi overnight. This means you should be prepared to inflate your tyres before every ride.

Pros and cons

Being thinner than standard tubes they are much lighter too — a Challenge latex tube measured 54g, compared with 109g for a standard butyl tube. However, being thinner Heasman explained, “Latex tubes are more prone to heat fluctuations and will likely blow out sooner than a butyl tube on heated rims through prolonged braking.”

Bear in mind that if you are faced with a long, wet or particularly technical descent, you may have no choice but to drag the brakes.

Heasman rightly points out that this is

potential advantage “in disc brake applications, where rim heat is irrelevant”.

With all this considered, what are the best applications for latex tubes?

For tubular tyre users, aside from the potential added cost, it is a bit of a no-brainer. There are none of the downsides of fitting and potentially trapping tubes, while you are able to

reap the benefits of lower rolling resistance. You also don't have to worry about rim heat build-up as much as with a clincher.

For those using clinchers, the most

obvious application is time trialling. Most courses are fairly flat, and a 5W saving could be the difference between winning and losing, or achieving a PB.

As previously mentioned, those using disc brakes could also consider running latex, but when the extra cost is considered, unless you own a rubber plantation you may decide they are best saved for special occasions.

“Unless you own a rubber plantation, they might be best saved for special occasions”



Industry view

Jonathan Heasman

Product promoter for Vittoria

Cycling Active: Are latex tubes faster than butyl?

Yes, latex inner tubes are faster. They are much more supple than a butyl tube. They will absorb the bumps and flex around bumps in the road, keeping the wheel/tyre on the ground more than being bumped into the air with a butyl tube.

CA: Why is latex faster?

It creates less friction in the tube itself and is much more flexible so absorbs the bumps.

CA: Can you put sealant in a latex tube?

Some (latex-based) sealant manufacturers suggest not to use their sealant in the latex tubes. Our TNT Pitstop tyre sealant works perfectly well with latex inner tubes.

CA: What else should we consider when using latex tubes?

Always check the real tyre width when mounted (tyres can measure up far wider on modern rims). It is really important to match the correct-width latex tube with the actual tyre width, not just the width it says on the tyre (it's worth getting the verniers out). You don't want to overstretch the latex tube. Installing is slightly more difficult than with butyl inner tubes.

CA: How does Vittoria test the rolling resistance?

Vittoria checks the speed of tyres and inner tubes with on a Rolling Resistance test machine (iron drum). This is the industry standard when testing rolling resistance.

Replacing your BB

James Bracey shows us how to fit a new bottom bracket and silence the source of most ride-wrecking creaks



Is there anything more likely to ruin your ride than a noisy bike? When it's creaking and clicking with every pedal stroke it can put a real dampener on your ride enjoyment. Often creaks and other associated noises can be easily rectified with a little detective work, and more often than not all clues point to the bottom bracket as the culprit. The bottom bracket (BB) is at the heart of your bike when it comes to making it go; it is the main set of bearings upon which the cranks and pedals spin. It takes the most punishment of any component on your bike so wear rates can be frightening — especially if you ride in all weathers.

Unfortunately most bottom brackets are sealed units which mean that once they are showing signs of wear it's out with the old, in with the new. This month we are looking at the common threaded, external version. Press-fit and other types will be dealt with in a forthcoming Quick Fix.

Time taken
30
MINUTES

JAMES BRACEY

CA MECHANIC

Self-confessed bike geek and senior bike fit technician at Pedal Heaven in Fleet, James rides for Pivot Boompods RT and has raced across a variety of disciplines for nearly 25 years.



Tools

Allen (hex) keys:
5mm (6-8mm for pedals)

External BB socket tool / BB spanner
(different BB brands might need different tools)

Socket tool

Preload cap tool (Shimano)

Torque wrench (ideally)

Flat-bladed screwdriver

Plastic or wooden mallet

Spray degreaser

Grease

Clean rags



1 CHECK YOUR PEDALS

Eliminate the pedals as the cause of the noise. Remove, re-grease, tighten and test ride. If still making a noise fit another set of pedals to double-check.



2 CHECK FOR PLAY

Once the pedals are ruled out, hold on to the crank arms and rock them sideways to look for obvious play in the bottom bracket bearings. If there is play then the BB needs to be replaced.



3 GET ACCESS TO THE BB

To get to the bottom bracket you will need to remove the chainset. With Shimano systems firstly loosen the two 5mm bolts on the left-hand crank.

4 REMOVE THE PRELOAD CAP

Use the preload cap tool to remove the plastic preload cap.

**5 REMOVE THE CRANKSET**

With the flat-bladed screwdriver, push up the retaining clip before removing the left-hand crank arm. You should then be able to push the axle through the BB to remove the chainset fully. If it doesn't want to move, use the mallet to tap the axle through gently.

Tip

Don't forget to take the chain off the chainring when removing the chainset!

**6 REMOVE THE OLD BOTTOM BRACKET CUPS**

The non-driveside cup uses a standard thread, but the driveside cup uses a left-hand thread, which loosens clockwise.

If you seat the tool pointing towards the front of the bike and push down, this will unscrew the cups on either side.

Tip

The BB should be tight so you might need a tool with a long handle or an extension bar to generate enough leverage.

**7 CLEAN THE SHELL**

Clean out the bottom bracket shell thoroughly with degreaser and clean rags. Inspect the frame thread for any damage before applying new, clean grease.

**8 FIT THE NEW BB**

Carefully thread the driveside cup into the frame, making sure not to cross-thread it. Tighten anti-clockwise to the recommended torque (normally very tight!) Then fit the non-driveside cup, which tightens in the usual (clockwise) direction.

**9 REFIT THE CHAINSET**

You can apply a thin layer of grease to the axle. Tighten the preload cap hand-tight until there is no play. Push the retaining clip down and finally tighten the two bolts to the recommended torque. Then ride creak-free into the sunset.

Is your saddle harming you?

Robert Thomas sorts the facts from the fiction when it comes to problems pertaining to the perineum

Certain aspects of cycling are quite punishing on the body, particularly in the saddle area.

Training schedules that involve a high volume and intensity of riding raise some health concerns. The aim of this article is not to put cyclists off this great sport but to highlight sensible nutritional strategies that will help diminish the risks and enhance performance. The potential health issues we're focusing on here relate to the intensity of some regimens and the trauma to the perineum.

Intense training can produce reactive oxidative species (ROS) that can damage DNA in the chondritic cells of the joints leading to arthritis and can cause genetic mutations leading to cancer. Testosterone levels, in the long term, can fall, contributing to fatigue, poor motivation, reduced erythropoietin levels leading to lower haemoglobin (anaemia) and erectile dysfunction (ED). The combination of ROS and lower testosterone explains the increased number of abnormal sperms and lower viable-sperm counts among elite cyclists, although an effect on actual fertility has not been established. Lower testosterone combined with the general lower body mass index of cyclists and lack of weight-bearing exercise leads to significant loss of calcium in the bones (osteoporosis), a condition that afflicted Chris Boardman and led to his early retirement.

Trauma to the perineum via repetitive direct compression of the prostate can lead to chronic inflammation of the prostate. This chronic inflammation is known to be a risk factor for malignancy and can cause enlargement of the prostate (Benign Prostatic Hypertrophy) leading to urinary problems such as a slow stream or having to get up in the night. This direct damage

combined with trauma to adjacent nerves and blood vessels supplying the penis can further contribute to ED caused by testosterone deficiency.

The prevalence of ED is debatable, however; some studies, such as the large UK 5,000-cyclist survey, reported no problems with ED, whereas others such as the Boston cohort study reported that ED was three times more likely among cyclists, especially those who use saddles that cause penile numbness. In women, repeated friction can lead to vaginitis, soreness, and bacterial and yeast infections.

Solutions

What can be done to reduce these potential risks? First, don't stop cycling. Exercise instigates numerous biochemical changes which have direct anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory properties including a lowering of growth cytokines such as Insulin-like Growth Factor (IGF), an improvement of insulin sensitivity, increased performance of natural killer

♂ Cancer & training

All cyclists in the study had a cancer rate that was three times lower than that of the general population



cells and lymphocytes, which improves immune recognition of infection and cancer cells; reduced markers of chronic inflammation such as cyclo-oxidase and prostaglandin.

The links between cycling and prostate cancer are, despite the hype, tenuous. The largest study, involving 5,000 cyclists, reported a six-fold increase in prostate cancer among cyclists who trained more than eight hours per week compared to men who trained less than 3.75 hours. Less widely highlighted in the media was that all men in the study had a cancer rate that was three times lower than that in the general population. Nevertheless, the increased risk in elite athletes compared to other cyclists highlights the importance of reducing your intake of cancer-forming chemical (carcinogens) and increasing intake of natural anti-cancer foods.



Expert view

Prof Robert Thomas



Professor Robert Thomas is a consultant oncologist at Bedford and Addenbrooke's Cambridge University Hospitals and Professor of Applied Biological and Exercise Science at Coventry University.

CA: Do polyphenol-rich foods have other health benefits for cyclists?

These foods are also high in other nutrients such as plant proteins, minerals, fatty acids and vitamins essential for tissue repair including the cartilage within joints. Population studies have linked their higher intake to a lower risk of arthritis, a finding supported by laboratory experiments showing they directly protect cartilage-forming cells from physical trauma and chemical toxins. This would be relevant for cyclists at any level of fitness who also sustain a great deal of mechanical strain on their joints.

CA: Why does intense cycling reduce serum testosterone levels over time?

Although regular exercise delays the natural age-related decline in testosterone, strenuous exercise accelerates this drift. This is because after intense exercise, testosterone increases for about an hour depending on the level of fitness and age. The body then adapts to these higher testosterone levels by telling the testes to reduce production.

CA: What dietary measures can help prevent a fall in testosterone?

Well-conducted studies have demonstrated that low levels of vitamin D and essential minerals such as zinc, magnesium, selenium and chromium are associated with lower levels of testosterone. Reassuringly, the same studies showed that correcting these deficiencies increased testosterone back to normal and can also improve muscle strength, so increase your intake of foods that contain these minerals such as crab, oysters, fish, pumpkin seeds, Brazil and other nuts, fleshy green vegetable and seaweed. Cholesterol is a precursor in the testosterone biosynthesis pathway, so increase healthy fat intake, preferably from plant sources such as coconut, avocado and olive oil as well as smaller oily fish such as mackerel, sardines and anchovies. Avoid statins unless you have other risk factors for cardiac disease.

Eat less sugar and processed carbohydrates, as these increase blood sugar and risk Type 2 diabetes which is linked to lower testosterone. Pick less refined carbohydrates such as wild rice and quinoa.

To avoid carcinogens, in practical terms, you should reduce intake of foods that enhance chronic inflammation such as refined sugars and processed meats; avoid carcinogens such as acrylamides formed by super-heating carbohydrates (crisps, rye bread, even some cereal and energy bars); and avoid Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons and Heterocyclic Amine exposure found in processed and burnt meats.

It's important to boost the diet with polyphenol-rich foods, which have direct anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties as well as the ability to up-regulate antioxidant enzymes, which help mop up ROS. It's the polyphenols that provide the colour, taste and aroma of foods such as vegetables, spices, herbs, teas, berries, vegetables and fruits. The World Cancer Research Fund reported that individuals who eat these foods have

a lower risk of cancer and that well conducted trials of polyphenol-rich whole food supplements have demonstrated significant anti-cancer benefits.

The largest and most notable of these was the UK government-backed national Pomi-T trial which showed that a supplement containing a blend of purified, high-grade turmeric, pomegranate, green tea and broccoli prevented early prostate cancer progressing to more advanced disease in a large proportion of men compared to those taking a placebo.

In conclusion, the biochemical changes which arise after exercise, such as cycling, have significant cancer and chronic disease protection properties. Nevertheless, the generation of free radicals, fall in testosterone and local inflammation remain potential concerns with intense cycling.



CHALLENGES

TRAIN FOR RIDING LONG,
ALPINE-STYLE CLIMBS

ESTABLISH YOUR
FUNCTIONAL THRESHOLD
HEART RATE OR POWER

COMPLETE OUR TARGETED
TRAINING SESSIONS TO
IMPROVE YOUR CLIMBING

SESSIONS

20-30MIN 'COMFORTABLY
HARD' BLOCKS

15-20MIN STEADY TO
HARD BLOCKS WITH
SURGES FOR EVENT-
SPECIFIC PREPARATION



HOW TO TRAIN FOR LONG CLIMBS

Words: Oliver Roberts

Galibier, the Stelvio, Hautacam, Alpe d'Huez, Ventoux — mountain passes are the icons of our sport, towering above all the other challenges. It's summer, so there's not enough time to build a completely new you before this year's events, but that doesn't mean you can't climb better.

Apart from buying a lighter bike, shedding a few pounds in body weight, choosing the right gears for your route and remembering to eat and drink regularly during rides, you can improve your pace and effort judgment by training your body to handle the specific demands of long climbs a little better.

HOW HARD IS HARD?

To an extent, how hard you should hit a long climb depends on the circumstances. How long is it likely to take? How long is the rest of the ride? How far into the ride is the climb? How many other long climbs are there in the ride? How much descending and flat road is there between them? Do you want to stay with a particular group of riders? After all, you can afford to go a whole lot harder on a single half-hour climb if that's your entire ride than if the same climb is the fifth one in a 100-mile ride. And if you want to ride with a group, you have no choice but to ride as hard (or easy) as the





REALITY CHECK

Do you need access to climbs during training to climb well?

With a lack of Alpine-esque passes here in the UK, many riders prepare by hammering up every decent British climb they can find. The trouble with this is that they end up climbing really hard and then freewheeling the descents in a sort of giant interval session. That's better than nothing, but it's not much like spending 45 to 90 minutes going steadily uphill. When it comes to holding pace and, for want of a better term, suffering continually on a long climb, you're actually likely to get more out of long efforts on really flat roads because there will be no descents to interrupt the effort.

riders around you.

Even so, the key to climbing well for you is ultimately about knowing what level of effort you can sustain, again and again over the course of a long ride. And it's not hard to work out — provided you have a way to measure your effort, and provided you're prepared to suffer a bit. Here's a simple test you can use:

Ride easy for 20-30min, and then ride as hard as you can for an hour without stopping (if you're unused to long hard efforts like this, pick a gently rolling route so that you have something to attack). At the end of the hour, you should be completely spent, so just spin home to recover and take the next day off the bike.

FIND YOUR FUNCTIONAL THRESHOLD

Your average heart rate (or, even better, power) for that 60min effort is your Functional Threshold (FT). By definition it's the hardest effort you can muster for an hour of non-stop riding. If you need to climb for longer than an hour in a single dose or do several climbs of between 10 and 60 minutes over the course of a longer ride, you certainly don't

want to climb harder than at FT.

Now take your Functional Threshold and multiply it by 0.95. The number you end up with is going to be close to your best possible repeatable climbing effort. Now all you have to do is use that number to pace your long training blocks (see below) and the long climbs on the big day when you reach them.

DRINK! DRINK! DRINK!

The importance of staying fuelled and hydrated when riding is well known. If you're hoping to ride well on a long day in the mountains, it's even more important — for three reasons. First: Continental climbs tend to be a lot hotter than the conditions we've adapted to back home. Second: Even slight dehydration slows your reactions, and that's bad news on descents you don't know, around riders you don't know — especially as you tire. Third: One way your body tries to delay dehydration is to burn more glycogen to release the water stored in the muscle. That means that failing to drink could lead to your using fuel less effectively and blowing up for no apparent reason.

TAKE-OUT SESSIONS

TRAINING FOR HILLS

The training sessions described below are variations on a theme. Both contain the steady, continuous efforts that climbing a mountain really requires, but after that they differ. The first supposes that you are riding alone or are not worried about staying with a group. Its focus is maintaining an even effort or power despite changing cadence. The second is designed to help you stay with a group of riders in an event, and mimics the almost inevitable too-hard start to the climb while training to dig deep, to surge and recover, again and again as different riders attack different parts of the climb at different efforts.

SESSION ONE

CADENCE SWEETSPOT

WHAT? 2x 20-30min blocks of Steady to Hard over a long ride.

WHERE? In an ideal world, each effort would be done up a long, even climb. But if you don't have access to such climbs, you can either start on the flat leading into the longest climb you can find or do the efforts on the flattest route available and focus on hitting the right cadence and effort.

HOW? When you reach the hill or road where you're going to do your first block, simply shift up and start riding a bit harder — aiming for a nice 'comfortably hard' effort that you could sustain for about an hour and a cadence of 85-90rpm. After two minutes,

shift up but keep your effort about the same so that your cadence drops to 65-70rpm. Stay at that cadence for two minutes, then shift down still maintaining that 'comfortably hard' effort but back at 85-90rpm again. Keep alternating between 65-70rpm and 85-90rpm every two minutes like this until the 20 minutes is up. Spend a couple of minutes riding very, very easy, then settle back at your normal riding pace. Make sure that you do at least an hour of relaxed riding before starting your first block, and make sure you separate your blocks by at least 15, ideally 30min. You can increase these blocks incrementally as you progress.

SESSION TWO

PRE-EVENT PRIMING RIDE

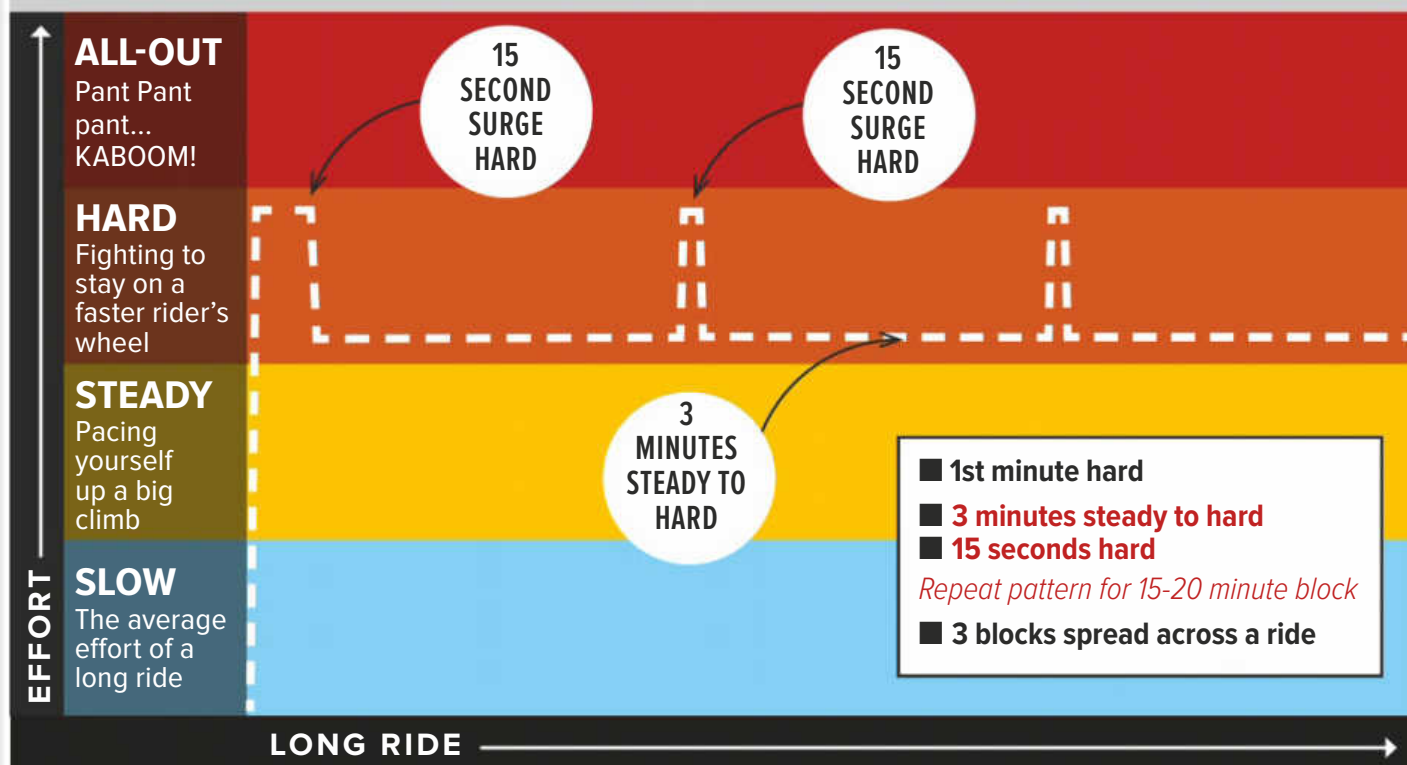
WHAT? 3x 15-20min Steady blocks with some short Hard and almost All-out efforts scattered across each.

WHERE? Like the cadence session above, the ideal location for this is a long climb or into a headwind on straight, flat roads.

HOW? The best approach is to spread your blocks out across a long ride — ideally doing no more than one per hour. As you start each block, stand and attack the first minute Hard, then sit and

settle at an even Steady to Hard effort and 85-90rpm. Stay at that level until you're five minutes into the block, then stand and surge almost All-out for 15sec before sitting and returning to your Steady to Hard base effort until another three minutes have passed, then surge again for 15sec. Keep surging every third minute like this until the block is complete, then spend a couple of minutes riding very easy before returning to your normal effort.

DURATION
3-4
hours



Using caffeine to boost performance

Caffeine is one of the most effective supplements, fighting fatigue and making training sessions feel easier, says *Laura Tilt*

Most of us have used caffeine to stave off tiredness, and there's no doubt it works. Caffeine is a naturally occurring stimulant, found in the leaves, nuts and seeds of over 60 plants — the most well known being the coffee bean.

Caffeine increases alertness via the central nervous system, blocking the action of adenosine, a chemical that causes drowsiness. Studies show caffeine increases focus and improves performance on challenging mental tasks — even during sleep deprivation. It also improves motor control, concentration and reaction time — all useful for cyclists — but research shows the benefits stretch even further.

Caffeine and exercise

As far back as the Seventies, scientists found caffeine improved exercise performance, allowing trained athletes to exercise for longer. The question was, how? Early studies hinted that the

benefits were down to the effects of caffeine on metabolism. Caffeine ferries fatty acids from fat tissue and muscles into the bloodstream, where they can be used for energy. Consequently, scientists thought caffeine provided the body with an extra energy source, sparing the body's limited carbohydrate stores.

A couple of decades later, and studies have shown these effects are short-lived and highly variable between individuals — although in 2015 researchers from Santa Catarina State University found caffeine improved time to exhaustion in trained athletes by around 22 per cent, thanks in part to a sparing of carbohydrate stores. So, if it's not just fuel use, what's happening?

According to Emma Barraclough, senior sports nutritionist at SiS, it's more likely that caffeine is acting on our brains

rather than fuel pathways: "It's a common misbelief... caffeine doesn't give you additional energy, rather it has a central effect on the brain, tricking you into thinking that you're not as tired as you really are."

We now know caffeine increases endorphin release — hormones that act as natural analgesics, reducing sensations of pain and fatigue. Consuming caffeine before heading out on the bike can therefore allow you to work harder without feeling as though you are. "For cyclists, caffeine can be really useful in tackling fatigue in the latter stages of a long tough ride," confirms Barraclough. "Within the professional peloton, the use of caffeine gels on mountain climbs or for time trials is very common."

CAFFEINE 101

A naturally occurring stimulant found in coffee, tea, cola and chocolate, caffeine boosts exercise performance via a number of mechanisms, including an increase in the use of fat for fuel, and a numbing effect on pain and fatigue. For cyclists, caffeine boosts power output and allows exercise to continue at higher intensities for longer, without perception of increased effort. Caffeine levels peak around an hour after consuming, so time your intake for the part of your ride when you need a lift — around 3-5mg per kilogram is effective — either taken as a supplement, or from a cup of coffee.



CAFFEINE IN FOOD & DRINK

Food / drink	Caffeine content (mg)
Cup of filter coffee	80
Shot of espresso	75-100
Cup of tea	27
Can of cola	50
Dark chocolate (100g)	43

Some studies have suggested caffeine can boost power output and performance by three to five per cent, in high-intensity sprints lasting one to five minutes, and in longer endurance sessions.

WADA status

Because of its performance-boosting effects, caffeine was previously banned by WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency), and throughout 1984-2003 many athletes tested positive, resulting in penalties and even suspensions from their sports. But in 2004 caffeine was dropped from the prohibited list, as it was feared the amount of caffeine consumed through food and drink could surpass the threshold, leading to unnecessary sanctions. However, caffeine still appears on the 'monitoring program' with those substances that WADA monitors for patterns of misuse. Sensible use is advisable.

From a health perspective, caffeine is safe to consume in moderate amounts — average intakes for adults are around 200mg a day (about two cups of coffee), well under the toxic (dangerous) level of 10g. Given that it would take 50-100 cups of coffee to reach this lethal level, toxicity is much more likely with caffeine powders or pills — so always check the label and avoid taking more than 400mg a day.

Sleep slayer

One of the main issues linked with a regular caffeine habit is the knock-on effect on sleep.

High intakes have been shown to over-stimulate the nervous system, making it harder to fall asleep. In a 2014 study from the University of Sydney, trained male cyclists were asked to perform a time trial consuming either caffeine (3mg per kilo of weight), or a placebo. Although the cyclists performed better after ingesting caffeine, they took on average 40min longer to fall asleep than those in the placebo group. Total sleep time was also lower — 6.5hr, versus 7.7hr in the placebo group.

The half-life of caffeine is around six to

seven hours — which means if you drink a coffee at midday, the levels in your body will have been reduced by about half by 6pm. If you do have trouble sleeping, the best advice is to limit your caffeine intake to the morning, and avoid using it during late afternoon and evening training sessions, allowing time for the effects to wear off by the time you head to bed.

If you are a habitual coffee drinker and are trying to cut down, do so gradually — headaches, irritability and mood swings can accompany the cold turkey approach.

Hydration myths

As well as having an impact on sleep, caffeine is often accused of contributing to dehydration, because it's a diuretic — meaning it causes you to pass urine more often. Although this is true, the effects are mild and more than cancelled out by the fluid contained in the drink — milk and water. Studies show that habitual tea and coffee drinkers are no less hydrated than those who avoid these beverages. The one exception is espresso — so follow the Italian habit of drinking with a glass of water to negate the effects.

And there's no need to worry that caffeine will result in needing more bathroom breaks during your ride. "While you're at rest, caffeine is known to be a diuretic, causing you to need the toilet more often," says Barraclough. "However, during exercise that effect is overridden, so you don't need to worry any more than usual about finding your next pit stop."

Using caffeine to your advantage

For competitive cyclists, the recommended dose is five milligrams of caffeine per kilogram of weight; however, studies show that as little as 1-3mg per kilogram of body weight can have a performance-enhancing effect. For a 70kg adult, this is anywhere between 70-200mg — a standard shot of espresso contains around 75mg.

Caffeine is well absorbed, and active individuals tend to experience higher peak levels in the blood than trained athletes, so it's worth starting with a lower dose, as you may find it effective enough. Timing is also important. "Whatever the demands of your event, you need to take the caffeine an hour before you need the benefit," says Barraclough. Blood levels peak about 45-90 minutes after consuming, so taking caffeine just before you head out is ideal.

There's also research that suggests caffeine can enhance recovery when consumed with carbohydrate, by helping glycogen stores recuperate more quickly — so taking a dose post-workout could also be beneficial.

**Caffeine and cyclists**

According to a 2008 study from John Moores University, Liverpool, almost twice as many professional UK cyclists use caffeine compared to track and field athletes, with coffee and energy drinks being the most popular forms.

**Hydration station**

Despite popular belief, caffeine is unlikely to leave you dehydrated. A study by the University of Connecticut found people urinate the same amount regardless of whether the water they drink contains caffeine or not.

**Drink Up**

Caffeine can boost cycling performance even in small doses. Around 1-3mg per kilogram of body weight can take the edge off fatigue during training. The amount found in one cup of filter coffee is about right.

Go natural or supplement?

Caffeine is found naturally in tea, coffee, cola and chocolate, although to get the levels needed for a performance boost, coffee is your best bet. In a 2013 study published in the journal *Plos One*, researchers found coffee was as effective as caffeine (taken as a supplement) in boosting performance time in cyclists performing time trials. If you're not a fan of coffee, you can use a supplement — many energy gels contain a measured dose — but caffeine chewing gum, powders and tablets are also effective.

Turn over for caffeine-based recipes



GO FASTER FOOD

MOROCCAN BEETROOT & HERB SALAD WITH NATURAL YOGURT DRESSING

Benefit from superfood beetroot in this low-calorie salad. Beetroot lowers blood pressure and can even improve your performance on the bike.

YOU WILL NEED

For the salad

- 750g Sweet Chilli or Red Wine Vinegar and Orange Blossom Honey infused beetroot from the infused beetroot ready-to-eat range, chopped into wedges
- 250g baby spinach leaves, washed & well drained
- Large bunch fresh mint, roughly chopped
- Large bunch coriander, roughly chopped

For the dressing

- 250ml Rachel's Organic Natural Yogurt (either low fat or full fat)
- 2 tsp cumin seeds, roughly ground
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- Sea salt & freshly ground black pepper

Serves
4
Preparation time
10MIN

* WHY IT WORKS

136
kcalories

3g
fat

7g
protein

24g
carbohydrate

METHOD

1 Pre-heat the grill.

In a large serving bowl, toss together the beetroot, spinach, mint & coriander, reserving a few of the herbs to garnish the salad.

2 Make the dressing in a small bowl by mixing all the ingredients together. Season to taste with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.

3 Drizzle the dressing over the salad just before serving and garnish with the remaining herbs.



PROTEIN PARCELS

SMOKED HADDOCK AND WATERCRESS FISHCAKES

These fishcakes with zingy lemon, buttery smoked haddock and peppery watercress are the perfect low-calorie lunch!

YOU WILL NEED

- 400g potatoes
- 30g butter
- 500g smoked haddock
- 1L milk
- 85g watercress
- Zest of a lemon
- 2 spring onions, sliced
- 2 tsp oil
- Flour to dust

METHOD

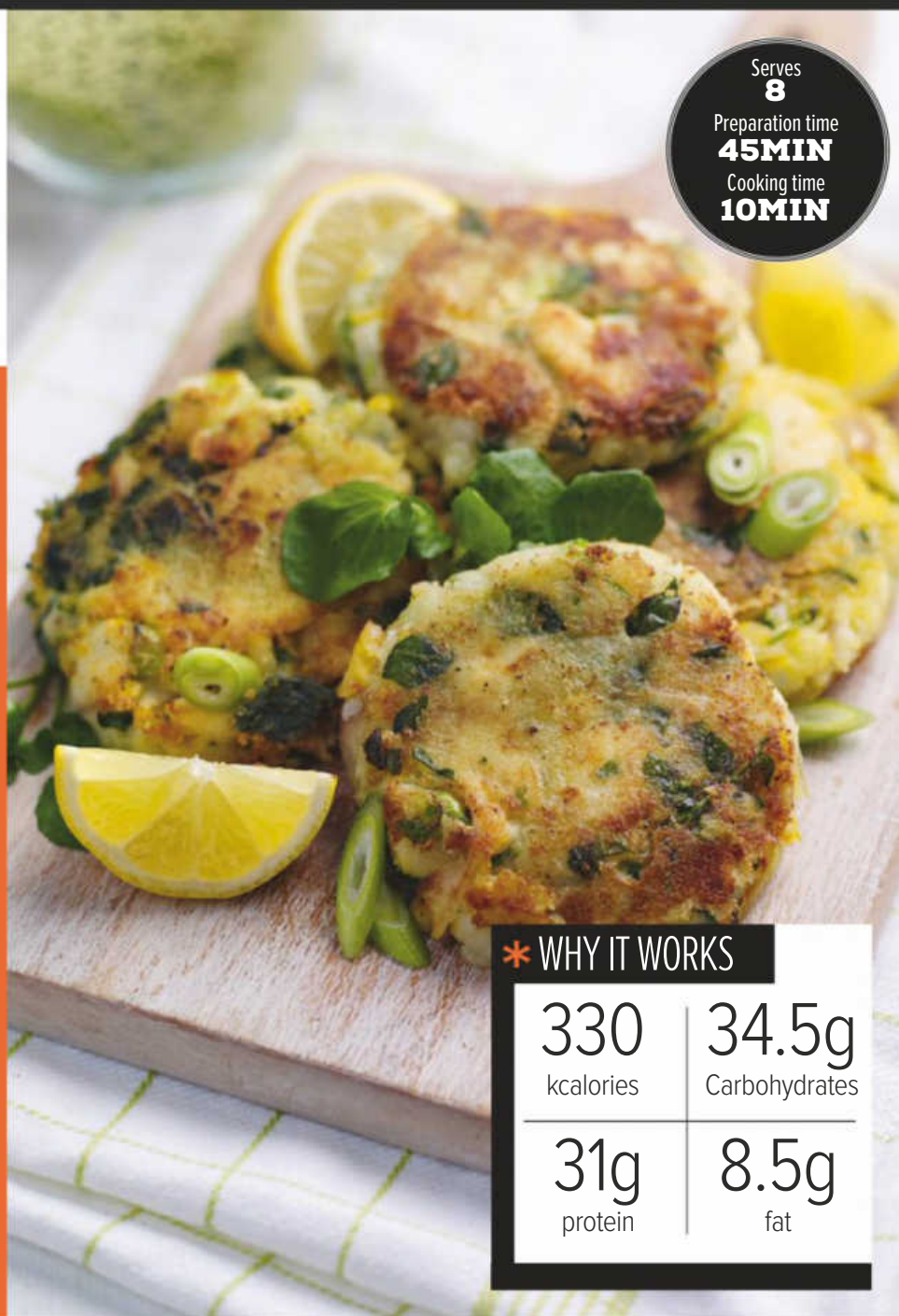
1 Peel the potatoes and chop into small chunks. Cook in boiling water for approximately 10 minutes until tender. Drain then add the butter, season and mash roughly.

2 Meanwhile in a large, deep frying pan, gently cook the fish in the milk (in two batches if necessary) for eight minutes or until it flakes. Lift the fish out of the milk and set aside on a plate. Chop the watercress.

3 When the fish is cool enough to handle flake it into a large bowl, add the mashed potatoes, watercress and spring onions and grate in the lemon zest.

4 Gently combine all the ingredients then shape into eight fishcakes, using your hands. Leave to chill in the fridge for 30min.

5 Heat two teaspoons of oil in a frying pan, dust both sides of the fishcakes with flour and gently fry on each side until they are browned and hot to the centre. Serve with a salad of fresh watercress.



Serves
8

Preparation time

45MIN

Cooking time

10MIN

* WHY IT WORKS

330
kcalories

34.5g
Carbohydrates

31g
protein

8.5g
fat

FITNESS+
TRAINING

PRODUCT FOCUS

How to block UV rays

Sun protection



20 mins

Apply cream 20 minutes
before a ride



SPF 30

Protection factor required
before a ride



10am-3pm

Time when UV levels are at
their most intense

When riding in the sun it's imperative to protect your skin, as *Paul Knott* explains

The naivety shown across the British population when it comes to sun protection is evident as soon as the sun makes its presence known each summer. We discard the layers, expose our skin and soak in the vitamin D. This is no different with cyclists, who are as keen as anyone to enjoy the good weather with long weekend rides. Despite being aware of the dangers that the sun presents, a number of riders ignore the advice given, especially when on British shores. Regardless of the location, the sun must be respected.

Gillian Nuttall from Melanoma UK speaks out about the dangers the sun presents in all countries: "We're very disrespectful of the sun in this country; we say, 'Oh well, we're not in Spain, we can go outside, we'll be fine.' It's still the same sun; it's still going to burn you. To get the amount of vitamin D that you need, you only need around 15 minutes of exposure."

This sun-worshipping culture is a big part of the reason melanoma is the fastest growing cancer in the UK, with it being the most common in individuals aged between 15-34.

"Ten years ago, around 9,000 people in Britain were being diagnosed with the condition each year; at the last count, in 2013, there were 14,000 people diagnosed."

One of the major issues that can occur with sun cream application is the timing. Nuttall explains how cyclists can be prone to putting it on too late: "Many people don't put it on in time. It's vital to apply it 20 minutes before heading outside. I see riders meeting at the side of the road and then applying sun protection — it shouldn't be done like that, that's too late."

Another issue that can plague cyclists is the reapplication of sun cream that is

required during a long ride. This can be particularly relevant during physical activity where sweat can rinse it off and skin is therefore unprotected once again.

"It's important to reapply every couple of hours — every time you take a break, at least. I'm not a fan of these sun creams that offer all-day protection — I'm doubtful about their effectiveness over the claimed time-span. If you're going to buy trust in a product like that, you need to see the clinical evidence first."

UVA and UVB

A common misconception is that you can only get burnt when the sun is out.

However, you can still suffer from sun damage when it is cloudy as it is the ultra-violet (UV) rays that causes the damage. These are classified into three types: UVA, UVB and UVC. UVC rays are the most harmful but fortunately the ozone layer stops them reaching Earth. The two other UV rays that we need to be aware of when out on the road are UVA and UVB. UVA are long-wave rays, which penetrate deep into the skin down to the thick dermis layer. UVA rays don't burn the skin but can lead to wrinkles and ageing. UVB rays are short-wave and vary in strength according to the time of day, season and location. Despite only penetrating the superficial layer of the skin they are the main cause of sunburn, as well as playing a role in the development of skin cancer.

Cover up

Another way to protect your skin from harmful rays is to cover it with clothing that is thick enough to prevent them getting through, or is designed with SPF ratings in mind. The importance of covering all parts of the body when heading out for a ride cannot be ignored, and cycling jerseys made from thin materials may not provide sufficient sun protection. This was evident when Chris Froome posted a picture of the sunburn he suffered through his lightweight mesh jersey while out training a few years ago. Nuttall reveals how even without clothing the amount of protection required to prevent damage can surprise many people: "To cover an average-sized person, you need a shot glass of sun cream — that's a lot. Even properly covering the face requires a 50p piece-sized blob of sun cream. Many people don't use enough."

"You can still suffer from sun damage when it is cloudy due to the UV rays"

CYCLING & THE SUN

The threat of the sun when cycling is one of the few health warnings that cyclists have to prepare for. Other than when riding on an indoor track or a turbo-trainer, the majority of riders will be subjected to outdoor conditions every time they get on the bike.

Researchers investigated the amount of harmful UV rays a professional cyclist is exposed to during a race. The UV exposure of six riders competing at the Tour de Suisse was monitored over the eight-day stage race. Results were measured based on the minimal erythema dose (MED), which is the amount of UV radiation that produces sunburn or redness of the skin. These measurements varied between 0.2 MED and 17.2 MED between a prologue and mountain stage respectively, with an average over all the road stages of 8.1 MED. This average level was more than 30 times the international exposure limits.

Obviously, it is impossible for professional cyclists to manipulate the weather to reduce their exposure to the sun, but cyclists themselves can easily limit its effects by applying sunscreens, wearing protective clothing and training in areas where intensity of harmful rays is lower. This may be trickier for professional riders who head to altitude to train, typically in countries with hotter climates where high mountains are open all year round.

Verdict

The sun shouldn't be seen as an entity that should stop you from cycling altogether; after all, you have trained through the bad weather in the winter so that you can enjoy sunnier moments out on the bike. So rather than fearing the sun, it is more a case of ensuring you are aware of the potential dangers it can bring and that you are prepared with the best methods to combat them and prevent any unnecessary skin damage.

Turn over for our sun protection products



Mavic UV Sleeves £20

Layering up when the temperature starts to rise seems counterintuitive but covering your skin with lightweight clothing could be a hassle-free way to protect it from sun damage.

Mavic's UV Sleeves are designed to wick sweat away from the skin to ensure your arms stay as cool as possible, while also providing SPF 30, unlike other cycling garments which let harmful rays through.

However, although the UV Sleeves are low in weight and lacking the insulation of arm-warmers, the feeling of wearing long

sleeves in warm weather can play tricks on the mind and make you feel hot even when you're not. If you go for sunlight-absorbing black, of course, this effect will be more than just psychological — best stick to yellow or white.

This is a good choice if: you are training in areas of high UV rays but low temperatures.

www.mavic.co.uk



Nivea Sun Protect SPF 30 lip balm £2.99

When it comes to skincare you wouldn't expect Nivea to disappoint, and this lip balm does a great job of protecting a body part that's both overlooked and vulnerable to dehydration due to the thinness of its skin and the lack of

protective lubrication from natural oils.

Nivea's Sun Protect SPF 30 protects against UVA and UVB radiation, as well as moisturising the lips thanks to the addition of sunflower extract.

Weighing just 4.8 grams, this lip balm can easily be slipped into your jersey pocket and taken out on a ride

for easy reapplication. Remember, though, that on the average ride this is likely to be a regular occurrence as sweating, drinking or wiping of the lips will all tend to remove the product.

This is a good choice if: you want easy access to sun protection while still moving.

www.nivea.co.uk



Halo Headband cycling cap £29.95

Halo Headband's cycling cap helps prevent sunburn and heatstroke on hot-weather rides, with an SPF rating of 50 for its black cycling cap and an SPF rating of 35 for the white version. The cap can be easily worn underneath a

helmet and both colour options feature a black underside to the peak to reduce sun glare further in.

Made from lightweight 'Dryline' fabric that is designed to wick sweat away and absorb moisture, it also has patented 'SweatBlock' seal channels, which prevent sweat from

rolling down into the eyes and face.

If a cycling cap isn't your preferred choice, Halo Headband also produces a number of alternative sun protection garments such as bandanas and sweat bands.

This is a good choice if: you require additional protection on top of your head or want to keep sweat out of your face.

www.haloheadbanduk.com



Tifosi Crit sunglasses £64.99

Despite being seen as more of a fashion statement nowadays, sunglasses play a far bigger role than just making you stand out in the crowd. They are crucial for maintaining eye health, whether through deflecting glare on sunny days

PROTECTION

UVA

UVB

during a ride, or protecting eyes from a painful condition called photokeratitis, in which UVB radiation causes burning to the cornea.

In both cases Tifosi's new Crit sunglasses hit the mark when it comes to protection. All of its lenses provide 100 per cent protection from UVA and UVB light rays, with the Crit

sunglasses offering full customisation when it comes to adapting lenses to suit riding conditions. These lenses are also vented to reduce the chance of them steaming up in hot and humid conditions.

9

This is a good choice if: you want sun protection to combine with style.
www.tifosioptics.com



P20 Once a Day Sun Protection £24.49 (150ml)

One of the main things that puts cyclists off the correct use of sun protection is the tedium of reapplying sun cream on multiple occasions throughout the day.

However, P20 Once a Day Sun Protection from Riemann eliminates the

PROTECTION

35
SPF

need for this with 10 hours of sun protection from a single coat, as well as being water-resistant to prevent it being sweated off in extreme conditions.

You can also ensure the right level of protection for your skin type and the climate conditions thanks to the range of SPF classifications

available from 15 to 50+. Coming as a spray or a lotion, the convenience of only needing to be applied once a day also brings the benefit of less to carry in your jersey pocket when heading out for an all-day ride.

8

This is a good choice if: you want to cut out the hassle of reapplying sun cream throughout a ride.
www.p20.co.uk



SPF AND PROTECTION

When it comes to sun protection, SPF is a common initialism that ranks the effectiveness of products. However, what it stands for and what level of protection is considered enough is often misinterpreted.

SPF means Sun Protection Factor and is a measure of how well a sun protection item blocks UVB rays. One of the great misconceptions is that the SPF rating runs linear to the amount of protection given. It is not simply the case that SPF 15 is half as effective as SPF 30, as SPF 15 will block around 93 per cent of UVB rays whereas SPF 30 will block 97 per cent, with SPF 50 only blocking one per cent more than that.

When it comes to UVA protection, it's important to look out for the five-star rating system that ranks products to show how effective they are at blocking UVA rays. A sun protection product with a high SPF and high star rating system is ideal for complete protection.





EVENT CALENDAR

The best events countrywide from August to September

Saturday August 20

WALES TOUR DE MON

DISTANCE 75/103 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,302M (LONG)

Entries are open

CA says Making a loop of the island of Anglesey you'll be presented with coastal view after coastal view and a quick hop over the impressive Menai suspension bridge. You also get to embrace your competitive side with the 'Flying Mile' — a timed stage on the runway of RAF Valley.

[@aaevents](#)

www.tourdemon.co.uk

N YORKSHIRE VELO29-ALTURA WHITBY REGATTA

DISTANCE 58/79 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 2,770M (LONG)

HQ The Whale Bone, Whitby, YO21 1QA

Entry £25

CA says From the harbour town, rolling along the roads that run parallel to the coastline, the climbs of the North York Moors are not far away. The first ascent will be the sharp Lythe Bank that takes you to Eskdale towards Danby but this section is merely pumping until you reach Castleton. This is where the serious work starts on Westerdale Bank — one of the toughest climbs in the Moors.

velo29events.com

NORTH YORKSHIRE YORKSHIRE TOUR

DISTANCE 81/103 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,560M (LONG)

HQ Thirsk Racecourse, Thirsk, YO7 1QL

Entry £35

CA says Starting on the edge of the North York Moors you'll move west to hit the inclines of the Yorkshire Dales and those roads made famous by the Tour's 2014 Grand Départ. Summer Lodge Moor will be one of the day's memorable climbs but watch yourself on the descent that takes you into Askrigg — it's technical, so keep your wits about you.

[@ukcyclingevents](#)

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

Sunday August 21

SW GLOUCESTERSHIRE COTSWOLD SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 75/100 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,569M (LONG)

HQ Cheltenham Racecourse, GL50 4SH

Entry £35

CA says This may be a fast run in the final 20 miles to the finish but the climbs come thick and fast as soon as you leave the start line. The last climb of the day comes between Snowhill and Saintbury but you can afford to go hard as it's the last test of this century ride.

[@ukcyclingevents](#)

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

S SUSSEX EVANS RIDEIT BRIGHTON

DISTANCE 60/90 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,524M (LONG)

HQ Plumpton College, Nr Lewes, BN7 3AE

Entry £25

CA says If you have never had the chance to ride Ditchling Beacon this could be just the excuse you've been waiting for. Although only one mile long, with the summit hidden from

view it will feel like a much longer push to the top. It averages nine per cent and hits 16 in places.

www.evanscycles.com

SW GLOUCESTERSHIRE SADBURY SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 60/100 MILE
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,899M (LONG)

HQ Chipping Sodbury Rugby Club, BS37 6GA

Entry £29

CA says Taking in the south of the Cotswolds, you'll travel through Hawkesbury and loop around to Nailsworth before heading to the River Severn vale. This event features Forceter Hill, an open and gradual climb (maxes 10 per cent in places), meaning you can sit in the saddle for most of the ascent and enjoy the view over the Cotswolds AONB.

[@SodburySportive](#)

www.sodburysportive.co.uk

I IRELAND SEAN KELLY TOUR OF WATERFORD

DISTANCE 62/100 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,990M (LONG)

HQ Dungarvan Sports Centre, Co. Waterford

Entry €40

CA says Now in its 10th year, The Sean Kelly Tour of Waterford loops around Dungarven and Waterford and takes in the Comeragh Mountains to really test your strength and stamina. Powers the Pot, a climb in Tipperary, rises over 400m and leads through Mahon and into the mountains.

po.st/SeanKellyTour

E NORFOLK TOUR DE BROADS

DISTANCE 75/100 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 722M (LONG)

HQ PedalPark, Scottow Enterprise Park, NR10 5FB

Entry £25

CA says These courses navigate the

tarmac that flows between Norfolk's network of rivers and lakes that form the picturesque area of wetland known as the Norfolk Broads. With modest gradients (around three-four per cent) there should be nothing to stop you in your tracks. A great event to get a group together and work as a team.

www.tourdebroads.com

C OXFORDSHIRE ZAPPI'S GRAN FONDO

DISTANCE 65/112 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 2,075M (LONG)

HQ Kirtlington Park Polo Club, Park Farm, Kirtlington, OX5 3JQ

Entry £28/£35

CA says Looks like you'll need your climbing legs here. One glance at the route profile and a cry of "the only way is up" from the organiser leaves us in no doubt this will be a long, tough one. Battling through the northern side of the Cotswold Hills, Fish Hill is the day's main leg-buster at one mile long and with an unrelenting gradient of 10 per cent and above.

granfondo.zappis.cc

Sunday August 28

C HERTFORDSHIRE HERTFORDSHIRE 100

DISTANCE 62/100 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,828M (LONG)

HQ Chancellor's School, Brookmans Park, AL9 7BN

Entry £20

CA says Surprisingly only a stone's throw north of the M25, this route takes on the countryside around Bishops Stortford before pulling west to Stevenage. The organiser warns you to keep some fuel in the tank for the pull through "the short sharp hills of Little Switzerland" that come just when your legs will be hurting the most — six miles from the finish.

[@Sportive_UK](#)

www.sportiveuk.co.uk

KEY

C Central **E** Eastern
EM East Midlands **I** Ireland
IM Isle of Man **NE** North East
N N. Ireland **NW** North West
Sc Scotland **SE** South East
S South **SW** South West
W Wales **WM** West Midlands
Y Yorkshire

NW CHESHIRE RISE ABOVE SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 62/99 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,575M (LONG)

HQ Chester Town Hall, Northgate Street, CH1 2HJ

Entry £39

CA says Mark Cavendish's official sportive will, for the second year, hit the roads of Cheshire, Chester and North Wales. The famous Horseshoe Pass in Wales will really push your limits — the road reaches a maximum height of 417 metres over four miles with an average seven per cent gradient.

www.riseabovesportive.com

NE NORTH PENNINES ROOF OF ENGLAND SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 56/90 miles

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,779M (LONG)

HQ Chatterbox Cafe, Market Place, St Johns Chapel, Co Durham, DL13 1QF

Entry £14.99

CA says With a route designed to look like the face of a winking sheep, this 90-miler weaves its way through the North Pennines and even squeezes in a 300-metre descent on cobbles in the town of Alston. With 20 per cent gradients commonplace you'll need to dig deep, especially on the final brutal ascent of Peat Hill.

roofofenglandcycling.co.uk

E SUFFOLK STOWMARKET AND DISTRICT CC 3 COUNTIES

DISTANCE 100 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 895M (LONG)

HQ Bloomfields, Quinton Road, Needham Market, IP6 8DA

Entry £14.99

CA says Whizzing through the Essex lanes, this route takes in many a quaint village and the lush surrounding of Dedham Vale, the inspiration for the painter, John Constable. The century ride will tick off the rolling lanes of the three counties of Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex. A licensed bar and barbecue at the finish should help keep the legs turning.

sdcc.bike/events/event/3-counties-sportive

Saturday September 3

Sc SCOTLAND BEALACH MOR

DISTANCE 90 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,926M (LONG)

HQ Kinlochewe

Entry £42

CA says If you've never had the opportunity to take on what many regard as the UK's greatest road climb, Bealach-na-Bà, this could be the perfect excuse. This is a pass that takes you through the Applecross peninsula. It rises 625m over 5.6 miles, averaging seven per cent with maximum pushes of 20. Needless to say it'll take your breath away.

www.handsonevents.co.uk

W WALES FIRE BREATHER

DISTANCE 75/98 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,191M (LONG)

HQ Ffos Las Racecourse, Dyfed, SA17 4DE

Entry £35

CA says Taking you past the site of Europe's largest open-cast coalmine in the Gwendraeth Valley, and the Dolaucothi Gold Mines that overlook the Cothi Valley, this is a mix of industrial Welsh heritage and vast countryside. Skirting the Afan Gorlech river and taking in the Brechfa Forest and the Brecon Beacons, it's a feast for both the legs and the eyes.

[@ukcyclingevents](http://ukcyclingevents)

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

SW EXETER MOOR 2 SEA SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 63/112 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 3,000M (LONG)

HQ Exeter Racecourse, EX6 7XS

Entry £34

CA says From the banks of the River Exe to the shores of the English Channel the routes heads away from the seaside views to take on the wild and remote terrain of the Dartmoor National Park. The route will include a timed hill-climb of the 3.6-mile long Haytor but the real challenge will be the climb through Ponsworthy that peaks at 26 per cent.

[@JustEventsLtd](http://JustEventsLtd)

www.moor2sea.com

Sunday September 4

SW BRISTOL BRISTOL BELTER

DISTANCE 63/100 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,450M (LONG)

HQ The Fry Club, Keynsham, BS31 2DB

Entry £24/£29

CA says Making a figure-of-eight loop, you'll first pedal towards the southern edge of the Cotswold Hills up to Castle Combe before delving south into the Mendips. It may come as no surprise that Cheddar Gorge is on the menu but there are a few other tough slogs including Burlidge Hill and the pull to Plaisters Green along Gravel Hill, where you can gaze over the Mendip hills.

www.bristolroadsportive.co.uk

SE KENT CIRCUIT OF KENT

DISTANCE 81 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 1,090M (LONG)

HQ Godden Green, Sevenoaks, Kent

TN15 0JU

Entry £30

CA says Hopefully the sun will still be shining on this late summer ride from the Kent Downs to the northern edges of the High Weald AONB. Make sure your legs are ready for action as you're in for a hilly start. You can get some good speed up in the middle section before taking on One Tree Hill — averaging 11 per cent — just five miles from the finish.

[@CircuitOfKent](http://CircuitOfKent)

www.kentcyclosportive.co.uk

NW CUMBRIA CROSS BORDER SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 80 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 1,745M (LONG)

HQ Lanercost, Cumbria, CA8 2HQ

Entry £25/£27

CA says From the edges of Cumbria the route pulls north and, if the event's name hadn't given it away, crosses the border into Scotland. You'll skirt the edges of the Kielder Forest before entering Braveheart country for the nine-mile slog over to Langholm in Dumfriesshire.

crossbordersportive.wordpress.com

E ESSEX ESSEX 100

DISTANCE 68/103 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 900 M (LONG)

HQ Colchester United FC, CO4 5JS

Entry £38

CA says This route makes straight for the lush surroundings of the Dedham Vale AONB. The rolling course with no challenging gradients



should allow you to get your head down and work on keeping a high cadence and average speed.

[@actionmedres](#)
www.action.org.uk/essex-100

SHERTFORDSHIRE ETAPE D'AMWELL

DISTANCE 93 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION TBC

HQ Allenburys Sports and Social Club, Priory Street, Ware, SG12 0DJ
Entry £30

CA says The organisers have promised hard climbs as you leave Hertfordshire for Essex, with the opportunity to battle for a KOM or QOM. The latter county will see you battle on timed sprint sections so if climbing's not your thing this is your moment to shine.

[@amwellsports](#)
www.amwellsports.org.uk

YORKSHIRE EVANS RIDE IT KING OF THE PENNINES

DISTANCE 100 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 3,353M (LONG)

HQ Aireville School, Skipton, BD23 1UQ
Entry £30

CA says You'd better bring your climbing game if you're going to take on this epic route through the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Aysgarth Falls, Fleet Moss and Halton Height contribute to a leg-busting 3,353 metres of total climbing.

www.evanscycles.com

WALES FIVE VALLEYS SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 72 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,474M (LONG)

HQ Margam Park, SA13 2TJ
Entry £35

CA says This rolling route spices up its 72 miles with the ascents of Rhigos and Bwlch. These are some of the toughest hills in South Wales and with each being over three miles long they could be hard-going if you've not been getting those hill repeats in.

[@ProstateCymru](#)
www.thefivevalleys.co.uk

LINCOLNSHIRE LE PETIT GRAND PRIX

DISTANCE 83/109 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,271M (LONG)

HQ Yarborough Leisure Centre, Breedon Drive, LN1 3SP
Entry £29

CA says This fast-flowing course will take riders from the outskirts of the city of Lincoln eastwards through the Lincolnshire Wolds. If you missed the action of the Lincoln Grand Prix this is a great opportunity to experience riding in Lincoln.

www.itpevents.co.uk

NW GREATER MANCHESTER MANCHESTER 100

DISTANCE 64/100 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 971M (LONG)

HQ Wythenshawe Park, Manchester, M23 0AB

Entry £20/£25

CA says Taking on the fast Cheshire lanes, this course rolls through Northwich, taking in the Delamere Forest and the market town of Nantwich. This course is fast — gather a group of mates and work together and you could see some really good times clocked up on the 100-mile route.

www.bike-events.com/manchester100km

C BUCKINGHAMSHIRE MARLOW RED KITE

DISTANCE 80/100/126 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,900M (LONG)

HQ Marlow Sports Club, Pound Lane, SL7 2AE

Entry £30

CA says If you're going to take on the 126-mile route then you're in for a tough opening 45 miles. This will include the climb of Whiteleaf — one of the steepest in the Chiltern Hills at 20 per cent — and Wardrobes. A flat middle section will afford you the opportunity to make up some time and aid recovery before hitting the hills again in the final 30 miles.

www.marlowredkite.co.uk

NE NEWCASTLE- UPON-TYNE NORTHERN ANGEL

DISTANCE 68/81/94 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,851M (LONG)

HQ Kirkley Hall, Ponteland, NE20 0AQ

Entry £35

CA says The Northumberland National Park can be a lonely place to ride. Many of the roads are remote and the number of climbs over the moors are sure to string you out from other riders. While you never actually pass the Angel of the North you'll catch glimpses of her as you climb through the park and take in the views back across Newcastle.



[@ukcyclingevents](#)
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

E NORFOLK PINWOOD CLIMBS SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 66/99 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 3,000M (LONG)

HQ Holt Rugby Club, Bridge Road, Holt, NR25 6QT

Entry £20/£25

CA says So, you think Norfolk's flat? This 99-mile route may not sound testing but if you dare to take on three loops of the Pinewood Climbs you'll clock up as much elevation as you would on an Alpine sportive. Traversing the ridge of the Norfolk Coast, Bard Hill will be the day's first hill-climb and, with a maximum of nine per cent, sets the tone for the day.

[@cyclesportives](#)
www.cyclesportivesuk.co.uk

Y NORTH YORKSHIRE SELBY THREE SWANS SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 66/106 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION TBC

HQ Selby Railway Sports and Social Club, Station Road, Selby, YO8 4AA

Entry £20/£25

CA says This is a mad, flat, fast dash from start to finish. The routes weave through the Vale of York, an area of flatland to the south of the city. If you're looking for a break from tough gradients, want to work on upping your average speed and get a quick time over 100 miles, this could tick all the right boxes.

[@3SwansSportive.org](#)
www.selbythreeswans-sportive.org

WM STAFFORDSHIRE TOUR OF THE POTTERIES

DISTANCE 62/94 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 2,672M (LONG)

HQ FUCHS Lubricants (UK) Plc, New Century Street, Hanley, ST1 5HU

Entry £35

CA says From the Potteries city centre that each year welcomes a stage of the Tour of Britain, you'll soon be busting a gut through the Peak District. But you will be able to flush that lactic acid from the legs as you spin through the Cheshire Plains on your way back into Staffordshire.

[@WheelsInWheels](#)
www.wheelsinwheels.com

Saturday September 10

N ANTRIM GIANT'S CAUSEWAY COAST SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 80/115 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 2,614M (LONG)

HQ North Street, Ballycastle, BT54 6BN

Entry £35

CA says You'll make straight for the coastal road before hitting the tough gradients of the Glens of Antrim, including the infamous Torr Head Road that comprises five climbs, each reaching 15-20 per cent in gradient. So pace yourself as you don't want to run out of steam before you reach the top.

www.giantscausewaycoast-sportive.com

Sat/Sun September 10 - 11

S KENT REVOLVE 24

DISTANCE 2.4-MILE LAPS
TOTAL ELEVATION 64M (PER LAP)

HQ Brands Hatch, Fawkham, Longfield, DA3 8NG

Entry £100-£170

CA says How many laps of Brands Hatch can you cycle in 24 hours?

To find out, get signed up as a solo rider or in a team of up to eight riders. Last year's winning team ticked off 518 miles with 13,564 metres of climbing. This will be a substantial test of physical and mental determination.

www.revolve24.com

Sunday September 11

C OXFORDSHIRE **BIKE OXFORD**

DISTANCE 80 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 1,030M (LONG)

HQ The Cherwell School (North Site) Marston Ferry Road, OX2 7EE

Entry £33

CA says Sandwiched between the Chilterns and the Cotswolds, the route heads east towards Waddesdon and on into Buckinghamshire. The majority of the hills come in the first 30 miles so be prepared to be continually pushing out of the saddle. Make up some time on the flatter middle section just south of Buckingham.

[@IconicCycling](https://twitter.com/IconicCycling)

www.iconiccyclingevents.co.uk

WM STAFFORDSHIRE **BOSTIN'** **PEAKS AUTUMN**

DISTANCE 62/93 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 1,626M (LONG)

HQ Uttoxeter Racecourse, ST14 8BD

Entry £25/£29.50

CA says Through the country lanes of Staffordshire where you'll be darting along the tarmac to the peaks and troughs of the moorland in the Peak District National Park. This is not a tough slog of a route as a network of flat lanes offer a welcome contrast to the ascents that pepper the Peak.

www.bostinride.com

S SUSSEX **EVANS RIDEIT ASHDOWN**

DISTANCE 65/88 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,092M (LONG)

HQ Sheffield Park Garden, Uckfield, TN22 3QX

Entry £25

CA says Heading through the Ashdown Forest in the heart of the High Weald AONB you'll be straight onto the undulations of the South-East without much of a warm-up.

Your legs won't get much of a rest so make the most of the rapid and flowing descents.

www.evanscycles.com

NW LANCASHIRE **LANKY TOURS**

THIN AIR 100

DISTANCE 100 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 3,000M (LONG)

HQ Edisford Primary School, Edisford Road, Clitheroe, BB7 2LN

Entry £25/£26

CA says This sportive has nine long climbs with five above 400m and the highest point at 535m, which is the ascent on the Coal Road (Dent Station). But the sneakiest of the day's nine long pulls is Cross of Greet that has a mini summit to conquer before claiming glory at the peak.

www.lankytours.uk

BM DERBYSHIRE **PEAK DISTRICT PUNISHER**

DISTANCE 77/101 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,809M (LONG)

HQ Bakewell Showground, Bakewell1, DE45 1AQ

Entry £35

CA says Prepare yourself for a punishing day out. Long drawn out climbs, stiff gradients and tough punchy pulls — this route ticks every climbing box. The first significant ascent comes at Eyam via Grindleford on the Sir William Hill Road. The highest peak of the ride takes you through Burbage and past the Macclesfield Forest.

[@ukcyclingevents](https://twitter.com/ukcyclingevents)

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

S EAST SUSSEX **VELOPACE BIG DIPPER**

DISTANCE 102 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,274M (LONG)

HQ The Observatory Science Centre at Herstmonceux, BN27 1RN

Entry £25

CA says Now in its third year, the Big Dipper offers you just that — the chance to take on some big dips and peaks around the High Weald. The route is also East Sussex's version of a Hollywood home tour, taking you past Batemans, home of Rudyard Kipling, and Paul McCartney's place in Peasmarsh.

www.velopace.com

FRANCE **WIGGLE LE TRICOLEURE**

DISTANCE 66/76 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 1,309M (LONG)

HQ Dover Ferry Port

Entry £70

CA says Catch the ferry from Dover to spend the day on quintessentially French roads. As soon as you reach Calais you'll jump on the saddle on a road running parallel to the coastline before delving into the Caps et Marais d'Opale Natural Regional Park. Composed of short, punchy climbs, the longest climb of Escalles comes in the final few miles before a flat-out sprint to catch the ferry back to Blighty.

[@ukcyclingevents](https://twitter.com/ukcyclingevents)

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

S HAMPSHIRE **THE SOUTHERN SPORTIVE**

DISTANCE 70/100/122 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,860M (LONG)

HQ Churchers College, Ramshill, GU31 4AS

Entry £28/£29/£30

CA says Racking up just short of 3,000m elevation and pushing past that 100-mile barrier with 122 miles on the longer route, it's a great, late summer test of fitness. The most famous challenge of the day will be Ditchling Beacon but all those pushes up over the chalk downs to and from the coast will soon take their toll to ensure this is a tough day out.

[@cyclosportive](https://twitter.com/cyclosportive)

www.southernsportive.com

Sc PEEBLES **TOUR OF TWEEDDALE SPORTIVE**

DISTANCE 100 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 1,475M (LONG)

HQ Car Park, Station Road, Peebles, EH45 6AY

Entry £17.50

CA says Just over the border in Scotland, this sportive has finally added a 100-mile route to their list of options. It's not a hilly route but there are four key climbs to attack, the most notable being the long drag out of the town of Moffat at 68 miles.

www.peeblescycling.org/tour-of-tweeddale-sportive-2016

Saturday September 17

S HAMPSHIRE **NELSON'S TOUR DE TEST VALLEY**

DISTANCE 100 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 1,703M (LONG)

HQ Grateley, Nr Andover, SP11 8LH

Entry £30

CA says Held in memory of pro snowboarder and keen cyclist Nelson Pratt, this route through the Test Valley will pull you through ancient woodland, have you zipping past lush meadows and see you pushing over the chalk hills. The event has a fun atmosphere with a camping option. A chilled cider will be waiting for you on crossing the finish line.

www.nelsonstourdetestvalley.co.uk

E CAMBRIDGESHIRE **STEEPLE CHASE SPORTIVE**

DISTANCE 61/96 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 920M (LONG)

HQ Huntingdon Race Course, PE28 4NL

Entry £35

CA says Keep your head up and you'll see where this sportive gets its name — from the number of church steeples you'll see on the horizon. You'll travel through small villages of the three counties of Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Leicestershire. Fitter riders should clock up a gold standard time here as lesser gradients will see you powering through the course.

[@ukcyclingevents](https://twitter.com/ukcyclingevents)

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

C OXFORDSHIRE **THE HENLEY HIGHWAYMAN**

DISTANCE 62/113 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 2,542 M (LONG)

HQ Swiss Farm Camping, Henley-on-Thames, RG9 2HY

Entry £30/£35

CA says This 113-mile route is a testing pedal through the Chiltern Hills, where, in the days of the highwaymen, the many hills were used to hide in order to rob the travelling wealthy. The route will end with two crit-like loops of the town where crowds will cheer you home.

[@cyclosportive](https://twitter.com/cyclosportive)

www.southernsportive.com

Sunday September 18

NW CHESHIRE **CW125 SPORTIVE**

DISTANCE 65/80/125 MILES

TOTAL ELEVATION 1,429M (LONG)

HQ Oulton Park Circuit, Little Budworth, Tarporley, CW6 9BW

Entry £35/£40

CA says Through the Cheshire Plains, this fast-flowing course

starts and finishes with a timed lap of Oulton Park Race Circuit — the ideal element to embrace your competitive side. In the final 210 miles, the remains of Mow Cop castle will come into view and soon you'll be on the slope of the killer climb of Mow Cop with its 23 per cent gradient.

[@bookmyrideUK](#)
bookmyride.ipcshop.co.uk

SW CORNWALL CORNWALL COAST AND CLAY SPORTIVE WITH PHIL LIGGETT

DISTANCE 71/101 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 2,217M (LONG)
HQ Trewan Hall, Trewan, St Columb Major, TR9 6DB
Entry £25

CA says From the Trevoze Heritage Coastline across the 'Cornish Alps' (the peaks that are full of a form of granite perfect for making porcelain) down to St Austell, you'll rarely be out of the small ring on this undulating century ride. Maybe Phil Liggett will throw down some stiff competition to keep you pushing your limits and chasing that gold standard time.

www.cornwallcoastandclay.co.uk

EM DERBYSHIRE CYCLE DERBY SPORTIVE – NORTH DERBYSHIRE CHALLENGE

DISTANCE 100 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,716M (LONG)
HQ Markeaton Park, Derby, DE22 4AA
Entry £35

CA says This event takes place on the tranquil roads of the Peak District National Park, 16 miles from Derby city centre. Up through Longnor to Edale, where you'll reach the day's highest point, climbing 441 metres. You'll return via the Chatsworth estate, dropping off the Peak at Bakewell.

[@cdsportive](#)
www.cyclederbysportive.co.uk

E ESSEX ESSEX ROADS AUTUMN SPORTIVE

DISTANCE 93 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 900M (LONG)
HQ Brentwood Centre, CM15 9NN
Entry £25

CA says Starting just 20 miles outside of London, this is ideal for the city slickers to get out for some truly quaint countryside riding. This

clockwise loop reaches as far as Thaxted and Great Bardfield with its Tudor-style cottages, before turning south and brushing the outskirts of Chelmsford on its way to the finish.

[@essexsportive](#)
www.essexsportive.com

W SOUTH WALES EVANS RIDE IT SOUTH WALES

DISTANCE 76 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 2,377M (LONG)
HQ Parc Bryn Bach, Merthyr Road, Blaenau, Gwent NP22 3AT
Entry £25

CA says You'll need to be on point with your bike handling skills as there are many long fast (some six-mile) descents on winding roads that will require caution. The Brecon Beacons throw up some tough terrain including 20 per cent climbs that could see you tipping towards the red.

www.evanscycles.com

SW BRISTOL BRISTOL 100

DISTANCE 100 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,494M (LONG)
Entry £24
HQ Blaise Castle, Henbury Rd, BS10 7QS

CA says This century ride takes on the rural roads of the Cotwolds over to Malmesbury and north through Tetbury. The ride drops off the escarpment at Wotton-under-Edge to drop into the Severn Vale for a fast run back to HQ.

www.bike-events.com/bristol100

September 24 and 25

S HAMPSHIRE NEW FOREST 100

DISTANCE 64/103 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,389M (LONG)
HQ Matchams Leisure Park, BH24 2BT
Entry £35

CA says This sell-out event now runs over the whole weekend so you have even more chance of bagging yourself a spot. This route jumps straight into the New Forest before taking on a loop through the villages around Salisbury: Farley, West Winterslow and West Dean to name a few. An abundance of short, punchy climbs will keep you on your toes.

[@ukcyclingevents](#)
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

Saturday September 24

ISLE OF MAN CC ISLE OF MAN

DISTANCE 113 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,950M (LONG)
HQ TT Grandstand, Douglas

Entries are open

CA says Ride one, two, or three laps of the iconic TT Mountain Course on the Isle of Man. From lush farmland to the more remote Snaefell Mountains, you'll get some serious kudos if you can tick off three laps.

[@isleofmancc](#)
www.isleofmancc.com

Sunday September 25

E ESSEX COLCHESTER 100

DISTANCE 100 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 926M (LONG)
HQ Playgolf Colchester, Bakers Lane, CO3 4AU

Entry £5

CA says If you're looking to work on speed and smooth pedalling action, Essex is perfect cycling territory. This will be a fast dash, darting along lanes and through charming villages including Boxted, Polstead, Long Melford and Finchingfield.

www.essexcycling.co.uk

SW DEVON EVANS RIDE IT DARTMOOR

DISTANCE 63/76 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 2,454M (LONG)
HQ Tavistock Community Sports Centre, PL19 8DD

Entry £25

CA says Set your wheels out to explore the wilderness that is the Dartmoor National Park. It can feel like a lonely place to ride as so many of the roads are remote and with a large amount of uphill miles you

could really see yourself strung out from other riders. Haytor Vale, with its 3.6-mile long slope and a few 25 per cent pulls, could see you in the red.

www.evanscycles.com

SE GREATER LONDON L'ETAPE LONDON BY LE TOUR DE FRANCE

DISTANCE 92/117 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,161M (LONG)
HQ Lee Valley VeloPark, London
Entry £47/£49

CA says Taking in much of stage three of the 2014 Tour de France, this route utilises quick A-roads to take you through the Epping Forest. Essex may not be known for its climbs, but the rolling countryside is not an easy day out. The gradual gradients could sap momentum and will be all the tougher if a headwind is blowing over the plains.

[@HumanRaceEvents](#)
www.humanrace.co.uk/event/letape-london/

EM WARWICKSHIRE TOMMY GODWIN CHALLENGE

DISTANCE 62 MILES
TOTAL ELEVATION 1,127M (LONG)
HQ Marie Curie Hospice, Marsh Lane, Solihull, B91 2PQ
Entry £20/£21

CA says This course threads through the villages of Warwickshire, around Henley-in-Arden, crossing for a few miles into Worcestershire at Feckenham. Sarah and Mike Adams created the Tommy Godwin Challenge three years ago, inspired by the 2012 Olympics, to honour the 1948 Olympic medallist.

[@TommyGodwin1](#)
tommygodwinchallenge.weebly.com

New Forest + climbs
= perfect combination



NEXT MONTH

Ride story special

- The world's largest sportive: CA visits Cape Town
- Mont Ventoux: three ascents in a day
- Marmotte Ecosse: new closed-road gran fondo
- Hellfire Corner: flat and fast in Kent

Fitness

- Do low-carb diets work for cyclists?

Tech

- Women's jerseys tested

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KIERAN BLAY (RIDES A SWIFT ULTRA VOX)

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MASSIF 62 MILES
MINI MASSIF 44 MILES

43% **57%**
ON ROAD **OFF ROAD**

TOTAL ASCENT 2,465m

FIND OUT MORE & SIGN UP AT
WWW.CYCLINGWEEKLY.CO.UK/ADVENTURE-CROSS



Thigh-burning topic

Deep analysis
of something
really trivial
(unless you're
a cyclist)



Is fake tan acceptable for cyclists?

THE PRO Alec Briggs

"I think you should have to work for your tan"

Fake tan is a no-no in my opinion. I think you should have to work for your tan, and being ginger, that's a lot of work (and after sun)! When I say work, I mean sitting outside a cafe for hours with my shorts lined up with my tan lines to create a definitive before-and-after, which is essential for me to prove I am actually tanned, or at least a darker shade of white.

Once, in a race, I saw someone's fake tan run down their legs, turning their white socks a shade of orange. At the end of the day, if you can't be bothered to tone it, tan it. But never out of a bottle.

THE STAFFER Hannah Bussey, tech writer

"The redness is temporary; the damage is permanent"

While we all know a good tan is worth 50 watts on the start line, it isn't something to die for. Some vitamin D is good for your skin but even on the duller of days we should apply at least an SPF 15 sunscreen after 15 minutes of being outside.

Bike riders are even worse abroad. Every year in Spain I witness gung-ho cyclists burn themselves to a crisp on the first day of their training camp, and have to wear arm-warmers for the rest of the week. The redness may be temporary, but the skin damage is permanent.

As well as keeping your skin looking younger for longer, applying sun protection could reduce your chances of skin cancer by up to 50 per cent. Who cares if you fake it? Applied properly, it looks just as good as the real thing in my opinion.

THE READER David Mason

"Not everyone can afford Spanish training camps"

I'm a great advocate of fake tan. After a long, miserable UK winter a splash of Autumn Gold works wonders. Half a bottle of moisturiser with a tint of Gold gives many of us the confidence to stick shorts on again before the English summer hopefully provides a more authentic look! After all, not everybody can afford Spanish spring training camps to get the early-season edge. Confidence in the way we look promotes good vibes. Look good — ride good!

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